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# **THE PROFESSIONALISATION OF RUGBY UNION**

**by**

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## ABSTRACT

Rugby union was one of a number of versions of football to emerge from the mob games of pre-industrial England. It was adapted in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century into a pastime taken up by Gentlemen. During this period amateurism was the dominant hegemony, however conflict within the Rugby Football Union (RFU) over the concept of professionalism led to a schism with the working class clubs in the north of England forming their own professional version of the sport in 1895.

Over the next one hundred years, the RFU utilised its power and authority to maintain amateurism as the central concept of rugby union. For much of this period amateurism was regarded as the superior approach to sports participation. It was, however, a definition of amateurism that was based on a 19<sup>th</sup> Century ideal.

Changes took place in society, which changed the way sport was played. Sport became more serious and society began to demand only success from their teams. Rugby union was also influenced by the different cultures of the dominant playing powers of the Southern Hemisphere. As the 20<sup>th</sup> Century progressed, an emergent hegemony developed within sport, which emphasised qualities of performance that may be termed 'professional'.

In the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century amateurism was a residual hegemony within sport and most major sports had become both commercially oriented and professional. In its desire to maintain and promote rugby, the RFU had become dependent on commercialism and had also permitted cups and leagues to become part of the sport. Finally, rather than lose total control of the sport the IRB agreed to allow professionalism. The five years since 1995 have seen a continued struggle for the control of the sport in England and have led some to fear for its survival at lower levels.

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## Abbreviations

AAA	Amateur Athletic Association
AGM	Annual General Meeting
All Blacks	New Zealand Rugby Union XV
ARA	Amateur Rowing Association
British Lions	British and Irish Lions
EFDR	English First Division Rugby Ltd
EPRUC	English Professional Rugby Union Clubs
ERP	English Rugby Partnership
EU	European Union
FA	Football Association
FFR	Fédération Française de Rugby
FIBT	Fédération Internationale de Bobsleigh et de Tobogganing
FIFA	Fédération Internationale de Football Association
HQ	Headquarters (in this case of the RFU)
IAAF	International Amateur Athletics Federation
IB	International Board
IOC	International Olympic Committee
Sky	British Sky Broadcasting Group
IRB	International Rugby Board
LTA	Lawn Tennis Association
MCC	Marylebone Cricket Club
NFL	National Football League
NFU	Northern Football Union
QUANGO	Quasi Autonomous Non-Government Organisation
RFC	Rugby Football Club
RFU	Rugby Football Union
RSPCA	Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
Springboks	South Africa Rugby Union XV
SRFU	Scotland Rugby Football Union
UEFA	Union des Associations Européennes de Football
Wallabies	Australia Rugby Union XV
WRFU	Wales Rugby Football Union
WWF	World Wrestling Federation

# INTRODUCTION

The game of rugby has undergone great changes as a popular sport. It evolved from a mob game played by ruffians to a recreational activity *de rigueur* for public schoolboys. It later became a pastime for those gentlemen who wished to demonstrate their physical prowess and masculinity and in more recent times, developed into an activity that reflected the changing attitudes towards professional sport and the divisions within society. For most of the last one hundred years, rugby union has possibly been the major winter sport of the British bourgeoisie and became an important international sport that represented the nationalistic ideals of a number of countries. In the last three decades however, rugby union has become exposed to the realities of commercialism and the influences of a more diverse participating and spectating public. Unable to resist the drift towards professionalism, rugby union became a sport that fully embraced the demands of the commercial and entertainment sector. Despite these changes, there was a concerted effort within the higher echelons of the RFU to cling to the amateur gentleman roots of the game.

This thesis will examine how rugby union became a professional sport. Substantively this occurred almost overnight when the International Rugby Board (IRB) announced that the sport was 'open' on the 27th August 1995. During an era of increased commercialism and professionalism within the major sports, rugby union was regarded by many as the last bastion of the amateur ethos. Even at elite levels, rugby players were still performing in front of large crowds for virtually no remuneration. The years since 1995 have seen a struggle for control of the sport at all levels, leading some individuals to fear for the game's survival.

The supposition that prior to 1995 rugby union was an amateur sport (in the same sense as it had been in the previous century), is a rather misguided and naive

analysis of the state of modern rugby. It had been forced through a combination of circumstances to become a professional sport in almost every respect except that the players were not being paid for playing; at least not officially. A more profound assessment of the situation would suggest that this announcement was the end product of a gradual move towards professionalism during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as rugby union was uncompromisingly forced into a modern sporting mould, despite the opposition of the 'traditionalists'.<sup>1</sup> During the last three decades of the century, every aspect of the amateur concept was gradually dismantled until the last barrier to professionalism (payment for playing) was finally removed.

People have been playing and paying to watch rugby union for over 100 years. For most of this time the sport remained strictly amateur and one of the major roles of the Rugby Football Union (RFU) was to uphold rugby's amateur ethos. It was the popularity of rugby as a spectator sport that created the drift away from the amateur ethos. Consequently it became virtually impossible to separate spectatorism from professional sport, and this point is clearly elucidated by Ernest Hemingway in *Fiesta* when he suggests that "the moment people start paying to watch a sport, professionalism is in through the gate."<sup>2</sup> Rugby union became a professional sport on 27th August 1995. By coincidence it was the very same debates and issues almost 100 years earlier that had brought about the Great Schism on 29th August 1895. It was the politics of the 1895 split that resulted in the RFU refusing to countenance any level of professionalism and which left rugby in stasis for almost a century. For much of this period the attitude of the RFU was similarly matched in other sports. However in more recent years this dogma has been exceptional. The 20th Century has seen a rapid trend in all sports towards serious levels of competitive participation. Elias and Dunning have described this



as: “The inexorable erosion of ‘amateur’ attitudes, values and structures and their correlative replacement by attitudes that are ‘professional’ in one sense or another of that term.”<sup>3</sup>

The thesis explores the methods by which rugby established, maintained and ultimately lost its power to retain amateurism at the core of the game. It is important that the amateur paradigm is explored in great detail as it has multi-dimensional meanings and is far more complex than simply a question of financial remuneration. The roots of this concept are firmly grounded in the social mores of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century English Gentleman. Gradually over the last hundred years most of these meanings have been eroded, leaving payment for playing as the accepted definition of the term. The different facets of the amateur/professional debate and an analysis of the way that these have been affected by changes in society during the last one hundred years will be established in Chapter One. Chapter Two will examine the evolution of the sport from 1871 (when the RFU was founded) to the outbreak of World War One. This period was characterised by a struggle to establish the amateur ethos as the dominant trend within rugby. From 1918 to 1960, the principle of amateurism was firmly located within the sport and there was little dissension towards it. The methods the RFU used in order to maintain the status quo will be discussed in Chapter Three. Chapter Four investigates the period since 1960, which saw rugby union making slow but certain steps towards becoming a commercial sport. There was a growth in both the amount and importance of international rugby from the 1960s onwards that exposed key individuals to the playing and administration standards of other countries. The advent of the World Cup and Leagues in 1987 saw these processes of professionalism within rugby accelerate towards its almost inevitable climax. The

period since 1995 will be considered within Chapter 5. It is characterised by rugby union’s attempts to establish itself as a major commercial sport and traces the struggle between different factions for control of the game.

The thesis will employ multiple methods of enquiry and will specifically include a review of contemporary records and reports. Rugby has always been about the people involved in the sport namely the players, coaches, administrators and spectators. Life history methodology will be incorporated within this thesis. This approach will help explore and trace how changes to the game of rugby have come to be accepted by the groups and individuals involved in the game at all levels. Biographies and autobiographies will be used as source material and semi-structured interviews will be conducted with those people who have lived and played through this period. The individuals interviewed for this study are outlined below.

Brian Ashton	Had a playing career that spanned from 1966 to 1981. Played for Fylde, Orrell, AS Montferrand, Roma, Milan and Preston Grasshoppers. Has coached Fylde, Bath, Ireland and is currently Assistant Coach for England.
Bill Beaumont	Played for Fylde, Lancashire, The North, The Barbarians. In an international career from 1975 to 1982 he captained England (to a Grand Slam in 1980) and the British Lions. Currently part of the England Management Team
Ken Birrell	Played for Camp Hill and North Midlands from 1945 to 1959. Was Chairman at Moseley from 1992-1995.
Barry Corless	Playing career from 1967 to 1981 in which he represented Birmingham, Coventry, Moseley, Barbarians and England. Became the first full-time professional club coach in English rugby at Northampton in 1986. Has also coached Gloucester, Moseley and Nottingham.
Steve Holdstock	From 1975 played for Nottingham, the Midlands, the Barbarians, England B, went on tour with England in 1982. Also played for Manley and the Australian Barbarians. Retired from playing in 1995.



Damian Hopley	Played for Wasps, Barbarians and England. Played in the last amateur World Cup in 1995 and also won the World Cup Sevens with England in 1993. Forced to retire from the sport at the age of 28 due to a knee injury sustained while captaining the England Seven (for which he received no compensation). Set up the Professional Rugby Players Association of which he is now the Chief Executive.
John Leyshon	From 1983 to 2000, played for Exeter, Camp Hill and Greater Birmingham. Despite being actively pursued by Moseley chose to remain in junior club rugby throughout his playing career.
Ruari Maclean	In a senior career from 1984 to 1993, played for Gloucester, Moseley and captained both The Barbarians and Scotland B. Played on two Scotland tours.
Tommy Wallis	Born in 1898. At the time of writing was the oldest living International player. Played for Dublin Wanderers from 1919-1923 and Ireland from 1922 to 1923 before a knee injury ended his playing career.
Bernard White	Had a playing career from 1949 to 1969 and played for Headingley and Yorkshire. A RFU Staff Coach until 1995 he also coached Headingley and the Danish National XV.
John White	Played from 1966 to 1980 for Moseley, North Midlands and Midlands Division. Coach and Director of Coaching at Moseley from 1980-1989 and from 1998 to present.

### Overview

The game of Rugby Football, in common with all modern football games such as Rugby League, Association Football, American, Canadian and Gaelic Football and Australian Rules, is a direct descendant of the game of mob football that was commonplace throughout Europe from the Middle Ages onwards. It was the Public Schools that civilised and organised football in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and each school developed its own version of the rules. Eton and Harrow for example preferred kicking versions, while at Rugby School a game based on handling the ball rather than dribbling was played. During the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century a plethora of sports became centrally organised with common modes of play. When former public schoolboys formed the Football Association in 1863,

they incorporated ideas from the various factions into one form of football. Those who favoured the Rugby School mode of playing soon withdrew from the association and later, in 1871, formed their own organisation the 'Rugby Football Union'. Although originally intended for the elite of society, rugby was one of many sports that were embraced by the working class and by the late 1880s it was the northern working class players and teams that were dominating rugby. The working class influence led to the development of more meaningful competitions in the form of cups and leagues together with compensation for those players who had lost wages due to rugby playing commitments. All of these issues were unacceptable to those who wanted to maintain rugby as a purely amateur sport. The dispute polarised into a class and north/south divide. Eventually in 1895 this led to a split in which twenty-two teams withdrew to form the Northern Union. This eventually became the professional version of rugby, Rugby League.

Rugby union had also spread throughout Britain and to various parts of the British Empire and Europe. International matches between a select group of nations became the pinnacle of the rugby season. In England however, it was the regular friendly fixtures between clubs that were the most significant aspect for many players. This, in the view of the protagonists of the sport, gave rugby a unique quality in that it was how the game was played, rather than the result that was considered to be important. The RFU and later the British dominated IRB upheld the amateur status of the game very successfully and few people argued for any change until the 1960s. Although the game itself bore little resemblance to the game as played in 1871, the essential *raison d'être* of the sport remained the same. It was a game for players who were expected to behave like gentlemen, who were

to spend little time training for matches and perhaps most importantly were unable to receive *monetary reward*.

From the 1960s there was a gradual change of philosophy amongst players, supporters and administrators, as the fundamental principle of the sport developed in line with other sports and became more serious and competitive. Cups, leagues and coaching systems were allowed to develop and only the principle of remuneration was defended as the axiom of amateurism. Inexorably, this too was eroded and rugby became an open sport in 1995. Since then there have been struggles for control of the sport between the RFU, IRB, the clubs, various entrepreneurs and media moguls, with the players caught in the middle. The sport has changed and entertainment is now seen as a vital ingredient for the spectator. This contrasts greatly with the previous maxim in which sport was devised solely for the participant.

### **Power And Authority In Rugby Union**

An initial review of the events of August 1995, would suggest that the IRB agreed to allow rugby to become professional because they realised that the players would be unable to resist the amount of money being offered by media moguls in order to establish an alternative organisation.<sup>4</sup> Viewed in isolation this would be a reasonable assumption, however to fully understand how this judgement was reached, the events leading up to the resolution need to be taken into account. The decision to allow rugby to become a professional sport must be examined by attending to the structured processes that occurred over the previous hundred years. From an initial total resistance to professional rugby, there was a gradual shift in the power relationships between different groups that led to the events of August 1995. There can be little doubt that the changes that have



occurred are the result of power struggles and a change in the balance of power throughout society as a whole. Moreover, the relatively static nature of the sport from 1895 through to the early 1960s, can itself be regarded as an example of the way power played an important part in the development of the sport.

Power is a relationship and it is often described as the ability to make someone do something they may not otherwise have done. Power has been identified as having three faces: <sup>5</sup>

- i. The ability to influence the making of decisions.
- ii. The ability to shape an agenda and prevent the making of decisions.
- iii. The control of thoughts and hence manipulation of needs and preferences.

The ruling body of rugby can be shown to have demonstrated each of these faces in order to maintain the amateur status of the sport. They were able to accomplish this not only because they had the power but also because they had authority. They had achieved a legitimacy and rightfulness to hold power over others. Although power and authority are often used interchangeably in modern parlance, it is important that a distinction is made between the two concepts. Although the ruling class may have controlled the beliefs and attitudes of the [rugby] population, their authority only existed in the minds of this population. Although beliefs and attitudes are autonomous and are not subject to the control of those in authority, the RFU and IRB had the power to maintain the status quo. <sup>6</sup>

Weber described power as:

The chance of a man or a number of men to realise their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action.<sup>7</sup>

The RFU overtly used their power in the late 1890's when they forced through the amateur regulations against the wishes of many players and clubs (particularly from the north of England) who were in favour of some form of professionalism. For the next 100 years the power to enforce the amateur concept rested in the hands of a few men and although the membership of the RFU and later the IRB constantly changed over this period, the determination to retain the amateur status of the sport remained. For the greater part of this period there were few serious acts of dissent apart from a small number of individuals who left the sport to play rugby league.

Although in the 1960s many other sports embraced professionalism, most players, clubs and administrators appeared to accept the fact that rugby would remain amateur. Even in the 1990s there was no organised opposition to amateurism and the power wielded by those in authority was considerable. Yet in August 1995 when rugby became a professional sport, the advocates of amateurism appeared to be unable to prevent that change. This indicated a great shift in the balance of power.

The ability of the RFU to recreate itself over the last 100 years has had much to do with its ability to maintain the status quo. Within any organisation there is a tendency to recruit and retain within leadership positions those who have an acceptable profile. That is, there is a need to ensure that those who are given positions of power within an organisation will make decisions that closely reflect the norms of the organisation. This would, therefore, lead to homogeneity within the leadership of an organisation and continuity in the exercise of power. There would therefore exist a 'power elite', that is a group of people, linked by similarities of education, background or ambition, with observable characteristics

who will tend to dominate this sphere of society<sup>8</sup> (Appendix 1 illustrates this point showing the similarity of background amongst RFU Presidents). The legitimacy of the exercise of power may depend on the relationship between individuals and groups. For example, Player A may recognise and accept the right of the RFU to regulate his amateur status. Player B however may believe that the RFU had no right to reject his desire to seek financial rewards, but acquiesces to them because he fears their power. There have been a number of types of power identified that may be available to an organisation such as the RFU:<sup>9</sup>

- i. Authority. Attached to office and requires deference from others. (Those in authority may have many of the types of power available).
- ii. Power. The ability to influence others, to cause them to do what those in power desire.
- iii. Powers. Rights of the office holder. (These may be restricted just to the office or may vary with the individual).
- iv. Coercive power. The power available to make people do things, to punish them if they fail to comply.
- v. Force. This may have to be used if coercive power fails.
- vi. Violence. Differs from force in that it may not be legitimate.

The power and other resources available will normally be attached to the holders of office, particularly in an organisation such as the RFU, which Weber would have described as a legal-rational-bureaucratic organisation.<sup>10</sup> The RFU and the people who made up the Council had a great deal of power over those who played, coached and administered the sport. It could be argued that the RFU used coercive power in order to maintain the amateur status of rugby. It is clear that it was considered to be an important part of their responsibility in their administration by the fact that there was an Amateur Status Sub-Committee. There were also rather draconian laws drafted in order to deal with the issue (see Appendix 2).

Coercive power is more effectively used with the threat of force rather than the actual use of it. If force has to be used then it may be an indication of the absence of real power. For the RFU, the ultimate sanction was the threat of expulsion from the sport *sine die*; the difficulty with such a punishment is that once it is used, the individuals involved are no longer within the control of the RFU. It was an injunction that could only be used selectively, otherwise it would serve both as an indication of a loss of power and also could potentially create a discordant faction for disenchanted players. It is interesting to note that the northern clubs were not expelled from the RFU but rather that they chose to leave in order to establish their own code. Fortunately for the RFU, there was still mainstream support for amateurism in the south of the country. The dilemma was further highlighted in the 1980s and 1990s, when there were real breakaway threats from the top players who wished to form their own version of the sport. This has also been an area of concern for a number of sporting bodies as they have seen their power eroded because the individuals formerly under their control, simply set up and administered their own organisations. In recent years there have been breakaways in snooker, darts, tennis, cricket and boxing. In some cases there has been reconciliation in which the established organisations have agreed to compromises in order to retain their control. In other cases, most notably boxing, there are a number of organisations controlling the same sport. Unlike governments who can legitimately call on the use of force to impose their will, for sporting bodies expulsion is their ultimate sanction unless players also break the laws of the land. Although questions were asked in Parliament relating to the legitimacy of the RFU's ban on rugby league players and the QUANGO,



the Sports Council applied leverage, the State has never directly intervened in rugby's professional/amateur controversy.

Once the amateur regulation had been broken, the ban from rugby union was total. Even players who flirted with rugby league (through attending trials) were banned for life if caught. This encouraged the players who did want to try the alternative code, to play under assumed names in order to retain their freedom of choice.<sup>11</sup> Players who wrote autobiographies and those who played American Football were also subjected to the same outcome (on the basis that it had a similar shaped object ball) but this was not the case for those who played soccer, golf, tennis or any other sport professionally. In addition to the ban from playing the game, players were also banned from coaching and administration and in some cases individuals were banned from entering the clubs where they had once played.

I think that we looked for some money at some stage from the Sports Council to do some development work, I can't remember exactly what it was, but in order to qualify for this funding, your club had to be open. Nobody could be excluded from membership and I think that caused a little bit of a problem because it really meant we had to accept rugby league people in as well.

*Bernard White*

Although those who were banned were no longer under the power of the RFU, there can be little doubt that such cases served as an example to others. It gave the RFU greater power because they had demonstrated that they were prepared to use this power. The vast majority of players however had little real wish to play rugby league and therefore had no alternative but to accept their amateur status and agree with the concept.

The rewards you get from being an international player both socially and from an employment point of view meant they probably didn't feel it was worth their while uprooting from this area and going to live in the north of England. They [Bath

players] were riding on the crest of a wave in this country and I doubt if any of them were interested in leaving it.

*Brian Ashton*

It may be argued that it was fear of the use of force that led them to agree with this course of action. Coercive force is therefore a motivating factor and can be regarded as a form of consent. It has been argued that consent through fear is as legitimate as an uncoerced promise and that it should not be regarded as an abuse of power.<sup>12</sup> A further dimension of power was outlined by Weber who identified three different types of power<sup>13</sup>:

- i. Patriarchal or traditional power (supported by traditions and myths).
- ii. Bureaucratic power (a rational legal structure, characterised by impersonal rules and regularities and authority attached to offices).
- iii. Charismatic power (the personality of the leader is the key aspect, tends to temporary and not governed by rules).

The bureaucratic nature of the RFU has already been discussed at length. It is perhaps no coincidence that around the time of the 1895 schism, the RFU sought to give itself and the sport a greater sense of tradition by associating itself with a single act at Rugby School. It thereby identified itself as a sport based firmly within the middle and upper classes. Certainly the traditions of rugby were well established by the end of World War 1 and over the years the 'myths' about amateurism and how it safeguarded the very nature of rugby became entrenched. It could be argued that it was the charismatic power of the England Captain Will Carling, that contributed to the weakening of the traditional and bureaucratic power of the RFU.

Power does not always have to be regarded as action in which one person participates in the making of a decision that will affect another person. It is also

possible to exercise power by preventing decisions being made. This second face of power can be equally effective.

Power is also exercised when A devotes his energies to creating or reinforcing social and political practices that limit the scope of the political process to public consideration of only those issues which are comparatively innocuous to A.<sup>14</sup>

This 'mobilisation of bias' was used by the RFU to prevent discussion of the amateur principle. Once the issue had been settled by the vote in 1893, it was barely discussed again for another hundred years during which time the existing strength of feeling was utilised to overcome any attempt to raise the issue. Even when the elite players from England believed they were engaging in dialogue with RFU representatives, they found that they were being tied up in meaningless sub committees and that their efforts were largely defeated by procedure.<sup>15</sup>

In recent years however, there has been some concern voiced at many levels of the game as to the legitimacy of the RFU to exercise such control over an individual's freedom. Contemporary theorists of power demand some moral justification for its use, although as Bertrand Russell noted, any exercise of power limits the range of choices open to an individual.<sup>16</sup> Coercive power alone cannot last long or be entirely effective, it may create obedience but at the cost of efficiency and there needs to be a degree of acquiescence that individuals obey of their free will. As Rousseau commented, "The strongest is never strong enough to be always the master unless he transforms strength into right and obedience into duty."<sup>17</sup> Journalists raised the folly of losing the experience and expertise of retired players because of the 'crime' of writing an autobiography and even Parliament became involved when Peter Hain MP, threatened a Private Members Bill in order to end discrimination against former rugby league players in 1994.<sup>18</sup> Later David Hinchcliffe MP, demanded that no National Lottery funding be given



for the re-building of Twickenham unless the RFU ended its “blatant discrimination against those involved in other lawful sporting activities.”<sup>19</sup> For order to survive, the power must become authority. Even when power is wielded through force, there has to be some development of legitimacy if there is to be continuity, as those in power depend on opinion, with force always vested in the masses.<sup>20</sup> Without a unifying point they may lack the will and the clarity of purpose to use this, hence the need for those in power to dispose of any unifying force. This may explain the refusal of the RFU to allow free passage between the two rugby codes. Returning players could have discredited the carefully constructed myths that debased professional rugby and reduced the power of the RFU.

It has been argued that power only becomes legitimate if three conditions are fulfilled:<sup>21</sup>

- i. Power must be exercised according to established rules.
- ii. Rules must be justified in terms of shared beliefs between the government and governed.
- iii. Power must be demonstrated by an expression of consent by the governed.

Although it could be countered that legitimacy may be manufactured by the manipulation of what those who are governed think (through brainwashing or indoctrination) there can be little doubt that the RFU and IRB had legitimacy and satisfied the criteria outlined. Only once was their right to govern really challenged. This occurred prior to the World Cup in 1995, when Will Carling was sacked as captain by the RFU President for making disrespectful comments about the RFU Council on television (he referred to them as “57 old farts”). The England players made it clear that they would refuse to accept another captain and rendered the Council virtually powerless. Because people internalise the

legitimacy of organisations to have authority over their actions, there is a tendency to feel that they are deferring to power rather than yielding to it. It is only when individuals or groups feel strongly enough to fight back, that the reality of the situation is tested. Although freedom of action is still restricted, there is often a level of contentment. In general terms, if individuals believe that an organisation has legitimacy then it does so. For most of the last hundred years, the clubs and players have accepted the authority of the RFU.

Bertrand Russell suggested that power was the “production of intended effects.”<sup>22</sup> There is also a case for arguing that power may also be linked to the production of *unintended* effects. This is one of the cornerstones of the work of figuralists such as Norbert Elias and more recently Eric Dunning. The processes which occurred were largely the unintentional consequences of intentional acts, that is, although the act itself was deliberate, the eventual outcome was unforeseen at the time. An example of this is reflected in the decision of each Home Union to begin touring the Southern Hemisphere. The tour was organised in order to improve playing standards and to generate income. The unforeseen consequence of this decision was the increased exposure that British based players experienced in terms of the different attitudes to rugby and amateurism in these countries. This can only have served to challenge their perspectives on the game. It is by exploring the webs of interdependence between the significant groups that the erosion of the amateur principles, which governed rugby, can be better understood. It is perhaps pertinent to look at the role of the different groups involved in the development of a more free flowing and therefore more commercially attractive form of rugby. In 1992, there were sweeping changes to the ruck and maul laws, which eventually allowed rugby to be played at a much

faster pace. The existing laws determined that if the maul ground to a halt, the team that had been going forward was awarded the scrum, allowing the whole process to start again. Legislators have the responsibility of modifying laws periodically in order to sustain what Kew has described as game-viability.<sup>23</sup> They are required to change the laws in order to maintain game-viability if players devise tactics unanticipated by the legislators. This is what had happened in this instance. Some groups of players and coaches had developed a tactic that has been described as ‘up your jumper’ rugby. England in particular had utilised a group of strong players to develop a game based upon set plays and driving mauls. The intended consequence of this for the England team and coaches was success. This they achieved through winning consecutive ‘Grand Slams’. The unintended outcome was the alliance of a number of groups to change this law. Groups from the southern hemisphere (perhaps themselves under pressure from commercial interests) fearful of spectators drifting away from what had become a rather boring spectacle, joined together under the IRB to change the law. There was little or no consultation with the players or coaches. The different groups involved, legislators from different nations, players and coaches, commercial interests and spectators, all had a role to play in this process and at different stages had different relationships. These relationships were in a state of constant flux. A further facet of figurational theory is the application of the civilising process to rugby union.

There have been two significant periods where rugby has become more civilised and more in keeping with the tolerated levels of aggression within society. The first period, the beginning of the 19th Century, saw the codification of laws in order to move the game away from its mob origins and its propensity for high levels of violence. The second period occurred towards the end of the same



century with the abolition of some of the more brutal habits of the game such as hacking. The professionalisation of rugby may be seen as a third period of the civilising process. Logically the incentive of financial rewards may appear to have increased the temptation of players to resort to violence in order to achieve their objectives. However increased media presence may force the governing bodies to regulate more vigorously against violence, therefore having a sanitising effect on the game. There are parallels here with other sports such as boxing. Although the rewards are now infinitely higher than they were one hundred years ago, the sport is far more regulated and therefore less brutal today. The more a sport is in the public eye, the greater the level of convergence with the wider society in terms of acceptable behaviour.

Weber regarded authority as power cloaked in legitimacy, whilst he saw authority as the right to influence others.<sup>24</sup> A relationship, which includes the notion of authority, is not simply concerned with command and obedience, but also involves rationality and criticism as relationships also have the inference of freedom. Although obedience may be created with coercion, this will be at the cost of efficiency. Authority can control both the minds and behaviour of individuals at a low cost. That is, an acceptance of authority will lead individuals to behave in a manner that they may not entirely believe in, but they accept the right of those who have influenced their behaviour to do so. The acceptance of the authority of the officers in World War 1 reaffirms this point. Even though the soldiers knew that going over the top of the trenches, would mean almost certain death, they usually obeyed the command. Authority is therefore generally based on law and convention, the belief that there are ways and means of achieving an objective. Although it has been argued that the acceptance of authority involves



an abandonment of individual rational judgement, it could also be argued that it involves actions for which explanations can be given and therefore involves rational reasoning. Individuals lose some sense of freedom only in so far as they have consented to delegation and are therefore bound to accept authority and obey the laws.

Although authorities may have power as a resource, an indication that they may be losing their authority to make decisions is an increase in the use of power to coerce individual action. Although an authoritarian organisation will severely limit the choices of individuals, it may only do this in so far as it will promote stability. There is room for individual liberty, providing this does not lead to actions that may threaten the status quo and there is not necessarily a demand for ideological support from individuals, as would be the case with a totalitarian organisation. The RFU could not control how the players viewed the amateur concept and when sufficient numbers of players, supporters and officials, no longer supported the ideology on which those in power were basing their actions, they had lost the authority to continue to uphold this dogma. The process by which individuals come to accept modes of behaviour, is an aspect of power that is of crucial importance in this thesis.

In any discussion of power it is important to consider what might be termed the psychological base of power. Brainwashing and indoctrination may be the clearly unacceptable extremes of this form of power, but there is a more subtle variation, which reflects the power of the mores of society to influence behaviour. A proper theory of power must take into account the preferences formed by the existence of social structures, which give the opportunity for groups within society to exercise power and thus prevent individuals from autonomous action.<sup>25</sup>

This type of power is explained as “the dominant values and the political myths, rituals and institutions which tend to favour the vested interests of one or more groups relative to others.”<sup>26</sup>

The *mobilisation of bias* will under normal circumstances be seen to operate in favour of those protecting the status quo, that is a privileged elite. There will however be situations when popular pressures, that often utilise campaigns and movements, can win through. This level of thought control could be paralleled with the use of physical force in other regimes. Totalitarian power, as exerted by Nazi Germany and Pol Pot, used terror and brutality to gain control. However, it is unlikely that they were able to control the thoughts of their subjects, as effectively as modern societies are able to do so by the use of persuasion, particularly through the media. This type of power created what has been called “a comfortable, smooth, reasonable democratic infreedom.”<sup>27</sup> Karl Marx argued that it was the ruling class of any society that produced the dominant ideas, values and beliefs. It follows therefore that the exploited classes, the proletariat, are deluded by the weight of bourgeois theories and suffer from what Engels described as ‘false consciousness.’ As we do not exist in a cultural vacuum, it is very difficult to determine the degree to which we act autonomously; therefore it would be difficult to test this hypothesis empirically. The dominant values of a culture are upheld by socialising agencies such as education, the church and the mass media. The suggestion that western democracies suffered from the hegemony of bourgeois values was continued in the work of Gramsci. The assertion is that the power of those groups enabled them to promote their values through socialisation and therefore inculcate them into the minds of the masses. The process of cultural socialisation is highly

complex and it would prove very difficult to trace cause and effect. This notion is rejected by writers such as Dahl and Polsby who suggest that it is impossible to prove empirically, though they do concede that it may be illustrated with examples. Despite the potential diversity within society, there emerges a hegemonising tendency that results in certain meanings and patterns being preferred. A question that must be addressed is who determines these patterns of behaviour and in whose interest?<sup>28</sup>

The way sport is played has changed considerably since it was first organised in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century. It is now played in a manner that more closely reflects the mores and ideals of the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Gruneau (1984) described contemporary sporting practice as a:

Completely open, achievement based activity, conducted for the purposes of sporting careers and economic reward. Within this definition is the notion that enjoyment in sport is tied to skill acquisition, that specialisation is the basis for excellence and that some form of economic reward is justified and necessary in order to achieve at the highest level.<sup>29</sup>

The pattern of sports participation described by Gruneau is easily recognisable as the hegemony at the end of the 20th Century. This was not always the case. In the late 19th Century it was a very different model that was accepted as the norm; a model that emphasised gentlemanliness, discipline, co-operation and amateur ideals. It was this model, that has been described as a 'British Model', that was accepted throughout the world. British culture dominated during this period, with the USA and France in a secondary position.<sup>30</sup> Lincoln Allison has argued that the central theme of the internal politics of sport has been the conflict between the commercial-professional ethos and an amateur-elite ethos and it could further be argued that this was also a conflict between the British Model of sports participation and an American Model.<sup>31</sup> British influence may have been the



stronger during the formative stages of modern sport but, it is the American Model with its emphasis on a professional sport that has gradually replaced it. Even those sports who had clung onto their 'amateur' status in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century had become highly institutionalised and commercialised and could in many ways be regarded as professional. This was not a revolutionary process, but rather an evolutionary one. The period between the two World Wars can perhaps be described as a golden age for British sport, for although no longer a supreme power there was a style and cultural meaning to participation. Although these changes had been resisted by many traditionalists, the forces of capitalism tended to promote this development as a means of producing profits and in order to inculcate social values that they believed would strengthen their dominant status.<sup>32</sup>

There are many key stages in the adoption of a dominant cultural force and often external factors are also involved. Raymond Williams argues that culture is 'produced' as well as 'acquired' and that it is a constitutive process creating a specific and different way of life.<sup>33</sup> The important issue is how and why each model became the dominant force in British culture. It has been suggested that hegemony is never total or complete and that there are always alternative viewpoints, some of which will continue to be held by a minority of people and others that may eventually become the dominant view. Those practices which tie the present to the future (that is the ideas, which eventually become dominant), can be termed *emergent*. Those, which tie the present to the past (that is the retention of ideas, which had previously formed the hegemony), are termed *residual*.<sup>34</sup> There is, as anthropological and social research has indicated, an almost infinite diversity of human living patterns. Social taboos that today are held as abhorrent by the majority of the population (incest and cannibalism for example) have at

some stage in some societies been accepted as the norm. For example, in the Ancient Greek culture (held by many as the epitome of civilised behaviour) it was commonly believed that true love could only exist between two males, this is a minority view in contemporary western society. Williams has argued that cultural practices fall into one of three phases; dominant, residual and emergent. There are always alternatives to the dominant hegemony in terms of residual and emergent aspects of culture. The point is made that the hegemony of the dominant culture has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended and modified. At the same time it is also continually resisted, limited, altered and challenged by pressure not all its own.<sup>35</sup> In 1895, rugby union was in line with the dominant culture, but by 1995 amateurism as a concept was part of the residual culture and therefore the RFU was finding it difficult to retain this as its central premise. The amateur concept was not as straightforward as it seemed; it was multi-faceted and multi-dimensional. An understanding of the concept is pivotal to an understanding of how rugby became professional.

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**CHAPTER 1**  
**AMATEUR AND**  
**PROFESSIONAL: CHANGING**  
**CONCEPTS IN THE WORLD**  
**OF SPORT**

## Introduction

**AMATEUR** “One who practices a thing only as a pastime...unpaid player”.<sup>1</sup> This definition in itself would appear to be fairly satisfactory and goes some way to represent the ethos of the Victorian gentleman, for whom sport was to be taken seriously but not to be a source of income. The word amateur has its origins in Latin and means ‘pertaining to love’ and was used in the early part of the 19th Century to mean someone who did something for love; money was not part of the meaning until later. As sport became formalised, so there were attempts made to ensure that sport remained pure. It was essential that it was not associated with labour and thus became synonymous with the concept of being a gentleman, who did not need to seek reward for playing sport. In previous years, both the upper and lower classes had made money from sport, one from wagering on the outcome, the other as payment for playing. This led to a residual fear of corruption that lingered on into modern sport and the view was that if performers could be paid to win, they could just as easily be paid to lose. These were lessons that had been learned from the corrupt sports in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and their links with gambling. By the later stages of that century, it was largely only the lower classes that sought payment from sport. In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century with millions of people interested in the outcome of various competitions, sport became commercialised and could not remain truly amateur.

In virtually every sport in every country, amateurism gradually gave way to professionalism, in most cases as a result of bringing the masses into the game as players and as spectators. Of course the amateur level continued, though even there in many cases the sports became highly institutionalised, commercialized and technologically based – in effect becoming professional in all but the narrowest sense... Clearly in the larger context, modern amateur sport and modern professional sport mostly represent the same symbolic construct.<sup>2</sup>

Players within a sport can only be paid if there is sufficient money available to support this. Further, the sport can only become commercial if it is attractive to spectators and therefore must be a product that can be packaged and sold. The early rules of sport were devised for the benefit of the participants, a principle that often had to be sacrificed in order for the product to maximise its viewing potential. The level of bureaucracy of a sport is a factor often overlooked and the greater the number of employees, the greater the need to allow commercialism. Even if the participants are amateur, top level sport requires a high level of organisation. Those sports in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century where players remained unpaid still needed to ensure that they gained enough media attention and sponsorship to remain solvent. For example, the organisers of the 1998 World Volleyball Championships were worried at the lack of interest in their sport and decided that female players should wear shorts only half as long as those worn by male competitors. The style of the shorts was further described as being “tight in waist and length, and cut in an upward angle towards the top of the leg”. The dress code also suggests women should consider wearing a one-piece swimsuit-style ensemble in preference to the traditional shorts and top.<sup>3</sup> Today it is the interest shown by television that dictates the commercial viability of a sport. The greater the media attention, the greater the likelihood that sufficient revenue will be generated to enable the players to be paid. Even so, it is only if there are interested parties with sufficient influence and power within a particular sport, that the existing order can be overcome and the sport re-formed as a commercial and professional enterprise.

There can be little doubt that before World War II there was, within most sports, a disparaging view of those who sought to gain financially from sport. The

professional player was regarded as the social inferior and it is only relatively recently that professional performers have gained greater respect. Vamplew argues that the 'Golden Age' of amateur sport, a concept very popular within rugby circles, was little more than a myth. That the way games were played, arguing with officials, crowd rioting and performance enhancing substances are not just problems of the present era, but were also part of the fabric of late Victorian and Edwardian sport. There was a wage strike by England cricketers in 1896; a full scale riot in the Scottish Cup Final of 1909; deliberate foul play in soccer matches; poaching of players; drug taking by athletes and in the 1908 Olympic Games supposedly neutral officials were urging on the British athletes.<sup>4</sup> Even the iconic W.G. Grace was not averse to bending the rules and accepted a sponsorship deal with Colmans Mustard.<sup>5</sup> This, Vamplew suggests, is evidence that brutalised and commercial sport was part of the late Victorian and Edwardian era, and that gentlemanly amateurism in sport did not exist; that the notion of sportsmanship, civilised and reasonable behaviour applied to recreational activities, was not really such a hegemonic factor. Yet the examples used are from professional sports, and add weight to the argument against professional sport. Even the supposition that W.G. Grace was a shamateur and a cheat, does not detract from the view that amateurism was a widely held ideology.

Payment, or lack of it, as a definition of professional and amateur is far too narrow a demarcation. For the terms amateur and professional there is a requirement to expand the interpretations to embrace the concepts that became an accepted part of their meanings, for as society and sport changed, so the meanings behind these concepts also changed. The significance of the term 'amateur' in the 1870s was very different to that recognised by the players of the 1990s, which in



many ways had retained only the notion of non-payment for playing as an integral part of the meaning. In 1995, the England Captain Will Carling tried to explain the pressures that the amateur players were under when he said, “We aren’t playing the World Cup for fun.”<sup>6</sup> Such a statement would not have been acceptable 100 years earlier as it suggested a professional approach to the competition, yet it caused no controversy at all. By this time only the issue of payment for playing remained to be confronted. All other aspects had been resolved, ignored or forgotten.

### **An Indication of Quality and Commitment**

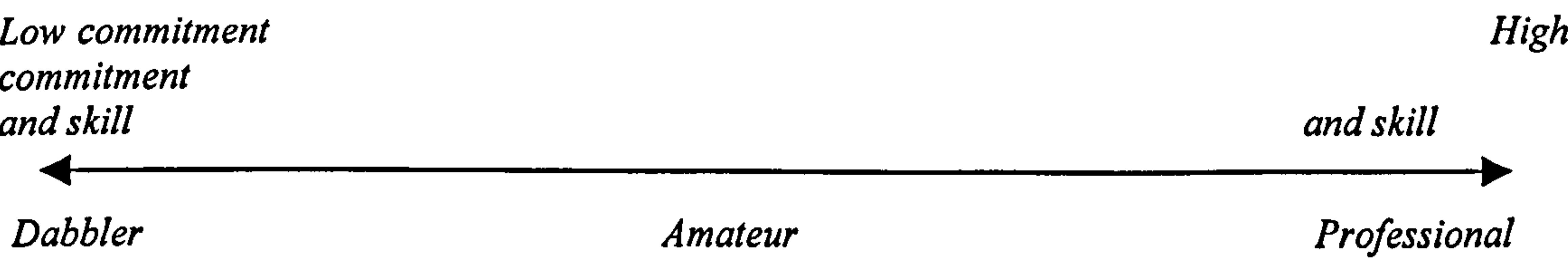
The difference between being a professional and an amateur doesn’t only mean getting paid for what you do as opposed to not getting paid. It is about attitude, motivation, developing skills and athleticism...Did John McEnroe want to win every rally he played because he was getting paid or because of the ranking of his opponent? Of course not. ...Professionalism is about preparing in a way that ensures the player performs to an acceptable level every week.<sup>7</sup>

In most spheres of human endeavour the term ‘professional’ is associated with someone who has a high level of expertise in their chosen field. Often this will include a period of training or apprenticeship that they have undertaken and a continuing commitment to maintain their knowledge and skills. Clearly the medical and legal professions would be included here, as well as the arts and more manual professions such as plumbing or carpentry. Conversely in these same occupations, to be an amateur would be an indication of low skill and expertise, someone who really only dabbles as a sideline. The distinction is not entirely one of economics, as the amateur in this case can receive recompense for their work, but it is usually far less than one would expect to pay a professional. Thus legends abound of those who have sought to save money by entrusting important work, such as the re-wiring of their home, to an enthusiastic friend of a friend only to see their cost cutting exercise blow up (sometimes literally) in their face. Occasionally



people entrust their legal affairs to amateur lawyers, but only the most foolhardy would consider allowing an amateur surgeon to operate on them.

Within sport there continues to develop a similar gulf in quality and it is normally only for the first few years of professionalism that the gifted amateur can keep apace with those who are able to devote all their time to the sport. This truism has certainly been shown to be the case in the past. In soccer, the Corinthians were only able to regularly defeat top professional teams before the First World War and in cricket only a few *Gentlemen* were still able to take the field on an equal footing with the *Players* into the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In most sports, amateurs have in reality little chance to compete with the professionals and in fact rarely do so in top class sport. Even the exceptions that prove the rule, such as John McEnroe reaching the semi-final of Wimbledon as an amateur, and amateur golfer Justin Rose finishing fourth in the British Open in 1998, are usually an indication of a flourishing professional career to come. Robert Stebbins argues that there is a distinction to be drawn between those who merely play at something with no real commitment or time involved, and the true amateur who pledges themselves seriously to their ‘hobby’.<sup>8</sup> This would suggest a continuum of skill and commitment.



However, it would be rare that an amateur in any field could have the qualities to truly compare with those of the professional. Eitzen concedes that the

professionals are likely to exceed amateurs in terms of skill, but suggests that the levels of seriousness of approach and commitment are liable to be the same.<sup>9</sup> This seems moot, particularly at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For the true amateurs, as contrasted with those who are in receipt of a scholarship, grant, endowment or commission, regard sport as an avocation rather than a vocation and therefore their career is increasingly likely to impinge on their time. This raises the question as to the legal and economic issues behind amateurism.

### **Economic and Legal**

Defining the amateur status of a performer has been a difficult and challenging task for sports administrators, as the legal definition has been transformed to accommodate changing circumstances. The modern Olympic Games were re-born in an era when the amateur performer was held in the highest regard and therefore amateurism was a central feature of competition. Thus, in 1912 Jim Thorpe was stripped of his Olympic Gold Medals in the Pentathlon and Decathlon when it was discovered (at the behest of the lower placed, future IOC President, Avery Brundage) that he had received a few dollars for playing baseball. Yet by 1992, basketball and tennis millionaires were able to compete in the Olympics as 'amateurs'. This situation had arisen because in 1985, the IOC was pressurised by several international federations to allow younger professionals (under the age of 23) to compete in tennis, ice hockey and soccer. Since this breakthrough, Rule 26 of the IOC amateur code has placed the considerations of eligibility completely in the hands of the individual international sports federations. This has caused some anomalies such as in the case of Willie Gault, who was not allowed to compete as an athlete in the Olympics as he was a professional football player and the IAAF deemed a professional in one sport was

a professional in all sports. He was, however, allowed to compete in the Olympic Bobsled as the FIBT had different regulations.<sup>10</sup> The strict IOC eligibility rules that had been a cornerstone of the Olympic games therefore fell to the demands of those sports where all the top performers were professional.

The rules pertaining to amateurism were developed in Britain in the 1880s. Most of the sporting bodies were against monetary reward and viewed it as a corrupting influence. As those who formulated the early regulations were from the higher echelons of society, their rulings tended to be in favour of those from similar circumstances.<sup>11</sup> Soccer, rugby, cricket, athletics, golf, tennis and rowing all had their own definitions of amateurism, but all these sports strongly favoured those participants from the middle class. Hence, players such as W.G. Grace were able to earn a good living from cricket whilst remaining an amateur.

It was perhaps naïve of the regulators to believe that they could prevent professionalism. The economic reality was that some sports were so popular as spectator events, that they enabled payment or compensation or expenses to be paid to participants, which eventually led to professionalism in many sports. Even when a sport becomes 'open' this does not completely eradicate the problem of defining amateur and professional performers. In 1998, there was a minor scandal in horse racing when it was discovered that a successful amateur jockey, Angel Jacobs was in fact a professional using a pseudonym and was exposed because his level of skill was far superior to that of the amateur riders. The employment laws that govern foreign sport performers (that is non-EU) working in the UK, require that they have recent international representative honours in their own country. Wendell Sailor was the most high profile name to be refused a work permit. As

one of the best rugby league players in the world, he was forced to play rugby union as an amateur in the 1998/99 season.

In many sports, economic realities have led professional players to achieve independence and latterly dominance.<sup>12</sup> For many sports performers, amateur sport was used as an apprenticeship for the professional version; the clearest example of this is boxing, where gaining an Olympic Gold medal is potentially the start of a lucrative professional career. It was important therefore that the sports authorities prevented their sport from being a showcase for those who wished to become professional. Tennis, athletics and rugby were amongst those sports that refused to allow free passage between the codes. Once you had become a professional there was no turning back. Golf is an example of a modern sport where the definition of an amateur is taken purely on remunerative grounds and professionals and amateurs are largely happy with their status. Golf still remains, however, an area where decisions have to be made as to a player's standing, as it is difficult (though not impossible) to revert to amateur status once a player has become a professional.<sup>13</sup>

### Politics

The governing bodies were founded and organised by those who would have considered themselves to be Gentlemen. It is highly unlikely that they would have given much consideration to the prospect of anyone of their class seeking to be rewarded for playing. Nor would they have given much for the possibility of those from the working class, dominating a sport to such an extent that their wish to be paid would become paramount. The rapid expansion of many sports took them beyond the realm of those who they were originally intended for and a number of sports, such as soccer, rugby and tennis also proved to be popular forms



of entertainment. It was the willingness of people to pay to watch these spectacles, that proved to be a threat to those who sought to maintain control and there developed a thin dividing line between sport and entertainment. The rules of sports were originally devised solely for the benefit of the players, there was no consideration given to anyone who may choose to watch rather than play. If the desire is to entertain, however, then great consideration needs to be applied to ensuring that the sport is attractive to those who pay to watch. Consider for example the venerable sport of wrestling. Greco-Roman wrestling is a highly skilled activity and is very popular in universities in the USA. Its rules are devised for the participants and only those with a high level of knowledge can enjoy the sport as a spectator. Professional wrestling, as exemplified by the WWF, is pure entertainment and its participants are more actors than sports performers.

There was a danger that sport could be taken over by those who wished to use it to make profits and therefore the governing bodies needed to ensure that their sport was not used as an apprenticeship for professionals. Almost inevitably this would lead to the professional version being considered to be the superior interpretation, particularly if free transfer between the codes was allowed. Each sport developed its own response to these threats. With soccer and boxing there was a grudging acceptance of the inevitable superiority of the professional. Cricket allowed the two to co-exist but with the amateur as the social (and often financial) superior. The response from tennis and athletics was more severe. These sports banned anyone who became professional from ever competing as an amateur again. Through this and skilful manipulation of the media, they were also able to maintain the reputation of the amateur competitions as the premier version. Anyone who took the opportunity of trying to make some money in the

professional sprint circuit such as the Powderhall in Scotland, was not recognised as a true athlete and their times were disregarded. Even in tennis when the best players of the 1960s were playing as professionals, it was still the amateurs at Wimbledon and Forest Hills that gained recognition.

Rugby Union was the sport that took the most draconian approach to this issue. They regarded any links with Rugby League as treachery and banned players *sine die*. It is clear the RFU believed that they could not allow their players to be free to play either version and so developed protectionist policies against a rival code. They were competing for the same players and later for the crowds and television coverage, but most of all for recognition as *the* rugby code. The protection of the amateur version was set shortly after the schism and the laws from 1901 demonstrate this fact, "...any player will become a professional who signs any forms of the Northern Football Union." <sup>14</sup>

The refusal to countenance breaches of this law resulted in the banning of many players from rugby union. Even having a trial or negotiating with a rugby league team carried the same ban, regardless of whether money was paid or if the rugby league team was amateur. Even those who played American Football were banned from Union, presumably on the basis that as it was played with an oval ball it carried a similar threat. Anyone who was a professional in any other sport was regarded as an amateur by the RFU, because other sports did not pose the same threat to rugby union. Despite pressures from the Sports Council in the 1960s and Parliament in the 1990s, the RFU made few concessions to this stance.

A link could be made between the amateur ideal and Marxism. Before World War II, it was professional sport that was seen as corrupt. Despite the elitist association with amateur sport in Britain, Marxists regard amateur sport as the

pure version with commercial sport being tainted by the notion that it is a 'boss sport'. Within commercial sport the performers have lost control of the means of production, they are told when, who and how to play and only in amateur sport does there remain the notion of freedom. However, a counter argument for this could be made, especially with regard to the control of a commercial sport that is played by amateurs. In the 1980s and 1990s, amateurism could be regarded as an exploitative ideology as the players were the *de facto* slaves of the RFU. For all their efforts and sacrifice they received very little reward, while the governing bodies gained vast income from the players' endeavours. Although the RFU was a non-profit making organisation, their power was based on the performance and dedication of the players. Their performances on the field, with the raised level of skill brought about by their 'professional' approach, contributed to the power of the organisation that they were in dispute with.

### Taking Sport Too Seriously

The last 100 years has seen the erosion of one of the main tenets of the amateur ethos; that sport should not be taken too seriously. It suggests that sport should be play rather than work and that if winning becomes more important than taking part, then sport has lost one of its most important qualities. It was believed that money was the root of all evil and that players may be corrupted into playing unfairly in order to win and earn their money. Fair play and refusing to take an unfair advantage over one's opponent, was an essential part of being a Gentleman. It was perceived that only Gentlemen really understood the true meaning of sport. They believed that those who felt that it was winning that mattered (not how you played) would ruin sport. C.B. Fry, who represented England at cricket, soccer and athletics and held the world long jump record, hated the rules that assumed players



would deliberately “trip, hack and push their opponents and behave like cads of the most unscrupulous kidney.”<sup>15</sup> Similarly, F.G.J. Ford berated batsman who used their pads against bowlers, describing them as “evil microbe, which cast a slur upon the moral value of the very word cricket.”<sup>16</sup>

For those who regard the present professional and commercial era of sport with some disdain, the amateur era was a time when participants gained all their satisfaction from playing. It may be perceived that the commercial process has led to a corruption of the ideals of amateurism. However, it may not be the money *per se* that is the problem; rather that it motivates the players to ends oriented, rather than means oriented behaviour and so fair play and justice are sacrificed. The notion of clubs playing each other in leagues, was seen as an indication of the wrong attitude towards sport. Leagues represented everything that was at the root of the ‘evils’ of professional sport, with the end taking precedence over the means. It was the Football League that enabled soccer to thrive as a professional sport at the end of the 19th Century, and it was leagues that were associated with the professional code of rugby.

Amongst the middle class of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the notion of fair play was central to their group identity and pervaded all aspects of their life. Sport was for the production of pleasure, an immediate emotional response rather than an extrinsic end.<sup>17</sup> The amateurs were the Gentlemen of the middle and upper classes, who shared many sports with the working class such as football, athletics and cricket, but what distinguished them was the way they played their sports for fun with the emphasis on fair play.<sup>18</sup> The voluntary adherence to the letter and spirit of the rules was vital; the non-pecuniary involvement was secondary and was designed to secure the achievement of what has been described as ‘play fights’.<sup>19</sup>



There was undoubtedly a fear of competition, as it was soon apparent that those who devoted time to practice at a sport, would be able to beat those who played just for fun. The 19th Century was the era of the amateur gentleman, one who could turn his hand to a number of sports; the true gentleman was expected to play several sports well without apparent effort and importantly to play with style. LB Melville, was British Amateur Golf Champion and represented Scotland at Cricket and Rugby, and was also national tennis, long jump and billiards champion. It was not conventional for a gentleman to have to work hard, as labour was for the lower classes and so the concept of training and preparing for sport was considered 'bad form'. Training was tantamount to work and was therefore considered to be less worthy than playing. When Blackburn Olympic won the FA Cup in 1883, they were accused of unsporting behaviour as they had trained hard for three weeks to ensure that "lower class passing overcame upper class dribbling".<sup>20</sup>

G.O. Smith, 19<sup>th</sup> Century footballer and cricketer, emphasised this. "The Corinthian of my day never trained and I can safely say the need for it was never felt."<sup>21</sup> The middle class desire for an amateur code that emphasised play rather than work and emphasised talent and natural ability, may have been an attempt to homogenise with the aristocracy. Traditionally, the gentry had developed a disinterest in money, they were a leisured class who had others to earn and manage their money, the only purpose of which, was to provide them with pleasure. The middle classes were to some extent tainted because they still had to earn money and they were in this respect closer to the working class than the upper class. Their leisure time pursuits could be similar to the leisured lifestyle of the upper classes only if this was clearly play and not work. The middle class took the moral high

ground in this matter and insisted that their notion of amateurism must be adhered to.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the situation had already begun to change. How the game was played became increasingly significant to many and winning started to become more important. The amateurs started a Counter Reformation with sport being seen to move away from the upper class values of effortless leisure towards a more middle class orientation of healthy competition and standards of excellence. Sport was therefore seen as the physical equivalent of strong spiritual values, but there may also have been a desire to re-establish the status quo because the professionals were showing the benefits of hard work. In the annual Gentlemen vs. Players cricket match, the Gentlemen won only seven times between 1837 and 1865. The later Victorians eschewed the virtues of application and teamwork, although fair play was still stressed. There also developed a desire to do one's best and to sacrifice oneself for the good of the team. For some die-hards the change was not without resistance and when Alford Lyttleton (Old Etonians) was berated for not passing during an England v Scotland match he replied: "I am playing for my own pleasure sir."<sup>22</sup> After World War I, it was accepted that some training would need to be done by amateurs who wished to compete at the highest levels. The alternative was to allow others (particularly the foreign athletes without the same class based societies or moral restrictions) to dominate events.

Fred Hirsch suggested that prostitution, the commercial side of sex, is also a corruption of an amateur ideal. That is, a sexual relationship between two consenting adults for a non-commercial reason is something that is pure and sanctified, but a sexual relationship for money is debased and loses its beauty.<sup>23</sup>

However, it could also be argued that this is simply a reflection of current cultural mores, that in some cultures the prostitute is held in high esteem (for example a *geisha*) as an accomplished practitioner of an ancient art. It can similarly be seen that a professional sports performer may be someone to be revered rather than reviled. In today's society, some of the well-established professions have a code of conduct and are self-regulating. If a doctor or solicitor transgress the ethical code of their profession they can be 'struck off' and must not continue to practice. There are few sports that have embraced this concept. For most, it is enough that the professionals possess the practical skills required for their sport. Any disciplinary action is taken by the governing body rather than from within the profession. The Professional Golfers' Association is one of the few organisations in sport that does have a code of ethics for its members, which also operates as a disciplinary code. As with medicine or law, anyone breaking this code can be prevented from continuing as a professional.

### **Social Control**

Traditionally the nobility had organised the clubs, such as the MCC and the Jockey Club, that had organised sport from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. The middle classes were permitted to share this responsibility, but there were limits to this process that excluded those who were from the lower ranks of society. A true Gentleman could be identified by his behaviour; this included notions of manliness and vigour, self-restraint and courage. Sport was an ideal method of proving not only manly prowess, but also these gentlemanly qualities. This relative democratisation of sport is an example of the negotiation and accommodation that was part of the homogenising of the elite of society. Therefore, it was the concept of being a



gentleman who could afford to play sport without reward, that became the exclusive part of amateurism.

Holt is one of many that have argued that there is little wrong with a vision of sport based on the amateur principles. Where this principle falls into disrepute is that it was used as a means of social exclusion, in which the upper and middle classes in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century denied the workers the same access to leisure pursuits.<sup>24</sup> The groups that Matthew Arnold identified as ‘Barbarians’ were reluctant to allow the democratisation of sport, they were heavily involved not only at the level of the ideology but also, in Gramscian terminology, in active participation as a permanent persuader. It was they who set the boundaries and ensured that their interpretation of the ideology was dominant, giving them “status, exclusivity, security, power and of course pleasure in their sports.”<sup>25</sup> This reluctance to allow the working class to share their leisure activities may be attributed to insecurity on behalf of the middle class about their place in society. The professional sportsmen of the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries were from the lower classes and were regarded as little more than talented servants. The middle classes wished to distance themselves from such a position and shunned professional sport. Dunning and Sheard suggest that it was the more bourgeois sporting organisations that were more determined to ringfence their sports.<sup>26</sup> It may also be accounted for in a genuine fear of revolution and social change and that as the working class began to mobilise themselves into a political force in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the ruling elite were afraid of any occasion in which they gathered in large numbers. As sport became more popular as a spectator event, the working classes were discriminated against for a second time. The first wave of organisation of sport in the 1860s had excluded the working class purely on grounds of snobbery. By the 1880s and



1890s, those sports that had large numbers of working class spectators caused disquiet not only from a theological aspect, but also from fear of change and revolution. The idea of spectatorism, particularly the vociferous partisanship exhibited by the working class, was something of an anathema to the bourgeois. The social gatherings of the elite at sporting occasions were an opportunity to see and be seen. Thus, events such as the Henley Regatta, Royal Ascot or the Eton vs. Harrow cricket match were places to meet your peers, with the sporting occasion as the backdrop. However football, athletics and northern rugby matches lacked social control and had therefore a capacity for unruly behaviour. By excluding the working class, from these activities, the spectators were likely to be of a similar class to the players. In the case of football it proved to be beyond the efforts of the bourgeoisie to control the spread of professionalism and so the middle and upper classes withdrew from the sport and preferred instead to develop their own amateur organisation. A refusal to allow sports such as rugby to be played on a Sunday, which may have solved the broken time dilemma, further prevented the working class from becoming involved. Most British Gentlemen however, firmly believed in the role of sport in the production of the qualities required to maintain the Empire. The amateur concept during this period was undoubtedly a method of social exclusion and enclosure.

### **Foreign Interpretations**

There was a challenge to the English definition of amateurism from many other countries. They embraced the playing elements of sport with enthusiasm, but as their cultures were often vastly different from English class-dominated society, they were less enthusiastic about the amateur ethos. Even before World War I, there was a distinct difference between the attitudes of the British and the newer

nations. There was a constant redefining of the moral assumptions of the sport in other countries. They did not have the same conventions of being a gentleman and were prepared to treat their players fairly and to compensate them for time missed from work. The different attitudes of those from other countries was commented on by E. C. Buley (an Australian writing in the Daily Mail just after the First World War) on a caste system in British sport.

My correspondents go every yard of the way with me in condemning what I termed "snobbery" in sport...Now this is not the first time I have been allowed to express my views extreme, perhaps - on the injustice of amateur definitions in this country. I did the same thing before the war, and received letters as a result. My correspondents then told me I was all wrong, and advised me to go back to Australia if I did not like the way in which sport was conducted here...I have spoken to many thousands of Australian soldiers, and have gathered their almost unanimous impression that this is a country where there is one law for the rich and another for the poor.<sup>27</sup>

These differences in attitude continued to develop throughout the century. Increasingly the English attitude to sport came to be seen as inappropriate in the modern world and most sports adapted to changing circumstances.

### Conclusion

There can be little doubt that most amateurs choose their sporting hobby freely; for purely intrinsic rewards and for the sheer pleasure that participation brings. It would also be true to suggest that there are those who make sacrifices in terms of time, effort and finance in order to achieve sporting excellence. Where there are professional players in the same sport, it would be highly unusual for the amateur to be a more accomplished performer than the professional. If there is no alternative however, as was the case during much of this century for several sports, then there may be little to distinguish the top amateur from being regarded as a professional in every respect apart from financial reward. As one of the top amateur rugby players Gareth Edwards observed recently:

I spent a vast proportion of my time over ten years training, preparing and playing rugby. But rugby could not properly be called amateur, not even then...if we had been paid for everything we did and the way we did it at the time for Wales, I cannot think of a better way to live quite frankly. The nearest we came to experiencing a professional's life was on Lions tours. We had all the trappings of top professional sportsmen, and believe me I loved it.<sup>28</sup>

Amateurism was conceived during a specific period in civilisation and was highly appropriate for that time. It was associated with leadership, moral fibre and fair play. As a result, the term professional in sport has been a pejorative term, despite the fact that in other areas of human endeavour, law, medicine and even drama, it is associated with excellence. Amateur sport, as it was played in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, was a pure version and was certainly worth defending, yet it would be wrong to see money as the wholly corrupting factor. Vamplew argues that there has been an observed correlation between the rewards sought from sport and the amount of corruption within it and that within professional sport there is an increasing need to control the players through the use of sanctions. This, it is argued, is because they lack emotional control, as the need to win the match becomes more important.<sup>29</sup> This does not seem to be borne out in all modern sports, for example to be a golf or a snooker professional carries with it ideals of fair play and honesty. In these two examples respect for the spirit of the law is paramount and the players are largely self regulating, rarely needing intervention from officials. What may be more corrupting is the win at all costs mentality that pervades sport at all levels and an institutionalised attitude that money adds to the pressure to win.

The self-discipline and order that was so important to the Victorian elite is no longer evident. The class struggle is largely forgotten as the middle class has expanded and distinctions have become blurred by the increase in wealth at many



levels. The amateur concept as a 'privilege' has continued long after its originators were dead and long after its purpose ceased to exist. The world has changed and despite all the positive aspects of the amateur ethos it is something of an anachronism. Truly amateur sport as defined in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, now only exists for those who play occasionally and purely for recreation and perhaps significantly amongst those who are no longer good enough to be professional or who never were. Dunning and Sheard question if the increasingly industrialised, urbanised and complex society of modern Britain allows those who take their sport seriously to play for fun.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps the amateur term is actually holding back sport, and what sport requires if it is to recapture some of the essence of the amateur spirit, is to imbue the term professional with the essential qualities associated with the best sense of amateurism. Instead of viewing professionals as little more than handsomely rewarded menials, they should be empowered to take responsibility for their sport. To be professional should not only mean highly skilled and highly paid, but should indicate a sense of honour and pride in behaviour as well as performance.

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<sup>1</sup> The ConciseOxford Dictionary

<sup>2</sup> J.L. Arbena, (1993) 'Sport & Social Change in Latin America' p106 In A.G. Ingham & J.W. Loy, (Eds), Sport In Social Development: Traditions, Transitions & Transformations, Human Kinetics, Champaign, Illinois pp96-117

<sup>3</sup> R. Philip, (1998), "Volleyball: Short Route To Mass Appeal" in The Daily Telegraph (7.11.98)



<sup>4</sup> Daily Mail, (1996), Centenary CD ROM,

<sup>5</sup> W. Vamplew, (1988) Pay Up and Play The Game, Cambridge University Press

<sup>6</sup> Sir D. Birley, (1995) The Primrose Path: The Sports Pages Lecture,  
[http://info.mcc.ac.uk/UMIST\\_Sport/birley.html](http://info.mcc.ac.uk/UMIST_Sport/birley.html)

<sup>7</sup> M. Lynagh, (1998), 'Motivation Is The Key Ingredient Of Professionalism' in The Times 19/9/98 p42

<sup>8</sup> R. Stebbins, (1979) cited in D.S. Eitzen, (1998), 'Amateur Sport: A Sociological Overview' in CRSS Module 3 Number 4 pp135-143, University of Leicester

<sup>9</sup> D.S. Eitzen, op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> G.M. Wong, (1994), Essentials of Amateur Sports Law, Praeger, Westport, CT

<sup>11</sup> Sir D. Birley op. cit.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Royal & Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews, (1994), Decisions on the Rules of Amateur Status

<sup>14</sup> E.W. Moses,. (compiler) (1961) A History of The Proceedings of The International Rugby Board, 1886-1960 London RFU p11

<sup>15</sup> P. McIntosh, J.G.Dixon, A.D. Munrow, & R.F. Willetts, (1981), Landmarks in the History of Physical Education, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London p63

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.* p81

<sup>17</sup> E. Dunning, & K. Sheard, (1979) , Barbarians, Gentlemen & Players, Robertson & Co, Oxford

<sup>18</sup> R. Holt, (1989), Sport & the British: A Modern History, Clarendon Press, Oxford

<sup>19</sup> E. Dunning, & K. Sheard op. cit.

<sup>20</sup> E. Midwinter, (1986), Fair Game: Myth and Reality in Sport, Allen & Unwin, London

<sup>21</sup> R. Holt, op. cit. p100

<sup>22</sup> E. Midwinter, op. cit. p84

<sup>23</sup> F. Hirsch, (1978), Social Limits to Growth, Routledge, New York

<sup>24</sup> R. Holt, op. cit

<sup>25</sup> S.G. Jones, (1988), Sport, Politics and the Working Class, p21 Manchester University Press

<sup>26</sup> E. Dunning, & K. Sheard op. cit.

<sup>27</sup> E.C. Buley, Daily Mail 1919

<sup>28</sup> A.Kervin, (1996) 'Prince of Wales' in Rugby World November 1996, pp 55-58

<sup>29</sup> W. Vamplew, *op. cit.*

<sup>30</sup> E. Dunning, & K. Sheard *op. cit.*

## **CHAPTER 2**

# **ESTABLISHING POWER**

One of the attractions of playing in sport is the degree to which it is static. There are traditions, record books and rules which in some cases go back over a hundred years. This gives sport a sense of continuity and allows players to compare themselves to their predecessors, even if only in a superficial manner. As new technologies and scientific developments become available and societies change, so the nature of the sport itself becomes subject to change. The Industrial Revolution led to the traditional sports of the rural countryside being replaced by modern sports that were more suited to the reduced time and space available in an urban community. Important factors in this change were the development in technology such as transport (trains, trams and later the internal combustion engine) and communication (newspapers, sports journals, telegraph). This effectively made the country smaller and so enabled the arena-based activities to thrive, and led to the dominance of professional sport in modern society. The later developments in sea and air travel, radio and television extended the popularity of sport. Consequently this resulted in the major sports having many more spectators than participants and was the next phase of the process of the commercialisation of sport. Equally significant were the changes in attitudes towards sports and the manner in which they were played.

For the participant, major sports have the appeal of interaction in an artificially created environment, with fabricated rules that restrict behaviour. It is the encouragement of risk-taking in the pursuit of victory, which leads to tension filled moments for those involved. The need for people to seek stress in their lives has been explored in depth by Elias & Dunning, who explain the phenomenon in terms of a need to recreate the excitement of the hunt, the basic lifestyle of our ancestors as hunter/gatherers.<sup>1</sup> For the spectator there is an element of achieving



this excitement vicariously, in which, through becoming totally immersed in the sport, they have the feeling of participation and the spectator shares the highs and lows of the participants. Spectators can identify with the participants, the “I could do that” aspect (even if in the distant past or at a much lower level) allows the development of a bond. There is also the heroic element, where the participants show greater degrees of physical prowess. This allows the spectator to admire and respect the players, provoking a distance between the two, which will justify the outlay of expense in order to observe these feats. These two means of satisfying what may be a basic human need, was in part responsible for the conflict that enveloped sport at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. To participate in sport was exciting and the greater the rewards, the greater the excitement. This tension also drew in spectators enabling money to be charged at the gate and so leading to sport becoming a commercial enterprise.

Society itself had undergone rapid and radical change during the 19th Century. An industrial society had gradually replaced the agricultural way of life that still existed in most of England in 1800. The work was seasonal and though arduous, was also variable with periods of inactivity. During these periods of inactivity there evolved a wide range of traditional festivals, which provided the setting for sports of all kinds. Violence, brutality and unruly drunken behaviour were major features of these sporting activities, yet they were tolerated as a means of social control. The elite of society was dependent on the land for their power and their authority was dependent on consent as well as coercion. The Tory traditionalists regarded popular culture as part of a negotiated settlement and provided the violence was contained, allowed it to continue. Through patronage, the ruling classes also shared in some of these activities and others provided

professional entertainment in the form of sporting competition.<sup>2</sup> It was the corrupt attitude of some of these teams and individuals that would add to the distrust of professionals later in the century.

Towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century these traditional pastimes came under threat from a variety of sources. A Royal Proclamation for the Encouragement of Piety and Virtue in 1787 was part of a moral revolution, which affected many sports. Clergy and the authorities increasingly disrupted many sporting occasions and there were many successful prosecutions for those who broke the laws relating to the Sabbath. Local laws were introduced banning football, skittles, animal activities and racing. The economy and politics also began to shape the way sport was to be played, with the dominant hierarchy afraid of the threat of social and political disorder, first from Jacobinism and later Chartism. They were determined to change the way of life of the masses and further to suppress forms of popular culture that were seen as threatening to social order.<sup>3</sup> This they achieved using a number of methods. The upper class withdrew their support from many of the activities, an action which detracted from the respectability that these activities had previously enjoyed. This was further emphasised by a number of campaigns that directly or indirectly targeted sport such as those undertaken by the Lord's Day Observance Society and the RSPCA. The number of holidays was reduced while the length of the working day was increased which, together with the observance of the Sabbath, impacted on the time available for play. Space became a premium and activities that were acceptable in the open environment of the countryside were viewed as a potential riot in the confines of the towns and cities. The industrial workforce was required to be more disciplined and the streets were kept clear to enable legitimate trade to flourish. In 1835, the Highways Act was

designed to clear the streets of 'nuisances' and the Cruelty to Animals Act of the same year was designed to end popular animal sports. These laws and others were rigorously enforced by regular police forces that began to appear in many towns and cities.<sup>4</sup> Any sports which were to be acceptable in the new society, would have to be restricted in the amount of time and space they occupied and would also have to comply with the requirements to be free from the taint of corruption and violent, uncontrolled behaviour. The power exerted by the ruling classes had shaped the labour and the leisure habits of the nation and suppressed the traditional sports of the previous century. This left popular sport firmly in the control of the ruling classes, to be moulded according to the norms of their culture, leaving the lower classes to take their recreation in the growing number of pubs. There was later to be a growing movement of those who wished to take the workers out of the taverns and introduce them to the more worthwhile activities of 'rational recreation'. The positive side of the social control was the use of Sunday School, the Church and factory schools to educate the masses, not only in how to read and write, but also how to behave. That is, having created a recreational vacuum, they were now seeking to expose the masses to the behaviour patterns of their social superiors.

Sports that are today part of a major multi-million pound entertainment industry, attracting participants and spectators from all over the world, evolved from activities with similar names and similar rules to those that existed in the latter half of the 19th Century. Soccer, tennis, athletics and rugby all developed because of the particular state of society at that time and reflected the culture of their origins. Cricket and golf, having been codified during the previous century, were already established and were adopted by the homogeneous elite of British society, as pastimes worthy of their patronage. The upper and middle classes



dominated the governing bodies of sport; consequently, it was the ethos of the amateur gentleman that became a prominent feature of participation. As a wider population with different codes of behaviour took up different sports, the debate between amateurism and professionalism grew in strength.

Sports of the late 19th century were essentially elite and patriarchal activities which enabled the men that participated in them to jointly show their physical prowess and their 'Gentlemanly' behaviour. For a Gentleman, it was the means not the end product of the sport that was important and taking part was for intrinsic rather than extrinsic reward. The social acceptability of a sport depended on it being amateur, the definition of which changed, dependent on the sport and the period. Lincoln Allison suggests that the period 1860-1900 saw a conflict between the amateur-elite and commercial-professional ethos, which resulted in a series of compromises, impasses and schisms.<sup>5</sup> Football, cricket and golf reached compromise solutions, allowing professionals to participate only under the control of the amateur administrators. In tennis and athletics there was impasse, with professionals banned and only able to participate in circuses put on by various entrepreneurs. These were less socially acceptable and were successfully marginalised by the establishment. The attempts to denigrate the professional version of rugby following the schism in 1895, demonstrated the strength of feeling against professional sport and established a pattern of scorn that was to be continued for the next 100 years. The process that Rugby Union underwent in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century can be explained in terms of organisational behaviour using the paradigm formulated by H.P. Tuckman.<sup>6</sup> The period up to the formation of the RFU (1871) was the *Forming* stage. The next period up to the schism of 1895 was the *Storming* stage and the period up to the outbreak of World War One was the



*Norming* phase. The *Performing* aspect of the organisation will be dealt with in Chapter Three.

### **Forming (c1823-1871)**

Traditionally the sport of Rugby Football has traced its origins back to the mythical moment when, during a game of football at Rugby School in 1823, one of the pupils, William Webb Ellis chose to pick up the ball and run with it rather than dribble it, as was the fashion of the time. This romanticised version of how the game started has, in recent years, been largely dismissed by historians who cite well known figures such as Thomas Hughes who claimed that the story was unknown when he started at the school in 1834, just eleven years after the event.<sup>7</sup> It was a former Rugby pupil, Matthew Bloxam, who originally prompted the issue in 1876 when he replied to an article in the *Standard* newspaper, which expressed the belief that the game of rugby was of great and unknown antiquity. Bloxam, who had left Rugby in 1821 and perhaps was stung into the defence of his old school, claimed the origins of the modern game lay with the events of 1823. It is the timing of the report from the Old Rugbeian Society into the veracity of the story in 1897 that could be interpreted as an attempt to claim a specific starting point for Rugby Union following the 1895 split. By claiming that the origins of the sport emanated from a respected institution, within a framework that shows it as a sport for gentlemen, a moral superiority was established over the rival sport that had a far less prestigious beginning. The report, which was conducted through correspondence with Old Boys of the School, largely supported the claims of Bloxam and became widely accepted by the general public.<sup>8</sup> Regardless of the reality of events, it is the name William Webb Ellis that is still associated with the birth of this sport. Consequently when a name for the World Cup trophy was

sought, it was that of the young boy who had once shown such ‘fine disregard for the rules’ that was adopted in order to maintain the links with the origins of the sport.

To the untutored outsider, the game as played at Rugby School would have seemed little different from the anarchic games played by gangs of youths in villages all over the country. Although football at Rugby had evolved from mob football, it had taken on traditions and unwritten rules which had made it far more complex and allowed the boys to show their prowess and develop the skills necessary to win a ‘cap’. In the Thomas Hughes novel ‘Tom Brown’s Schooldays’, Brown was told in his first few days at Rugby School that it would take him a month to learn the rules.<sup>9</sup> By 1845, the first set of written rules for rugby had been drafted by three pupils at Rugby School called *The Laws of Football as Played at Rugby School*.

In the early part of the 19th Century, various forms of football were being played all over England. The Public Schools each had their own slightly different versions of the game, each would claim that theirs was the only true version of the game and therefore resist any attempts to change. This was a manifestation of a broader struggle within the upper classes, which accompanied embourgeoisement. Pupils at Eton (who played the kicking game) saw themselves as aristocrats and looked down upon those at Rugby School as rather more bourgeois.<sup>10</sup> By the middle of the century England had a relatively homogeneous elite, with large numbers of upper and middle class young men having been exposed to the same socialising agencies of school and university. As a result of their experiences of playing games at these establishments, sport in general had become so popular that it formed a vital part of society. Football had gained respectability because

those who went to Public School and university played it; it had become the main activity that young men chose to play and the medium through which ‘gentlemanly’ values could be expressed.<sup>11</sup> As the means of transport and communication improved, it was becoming possible for players to develop national reputations, thereby enhancing their status in terms of skill and gentlemanly qualities. However players found the need to constantly adapt to the various rules in different areas of the country frustrating, and there was pressure on clubs, schools and universities to adopt a single uniform set of rules. These moves ultimately resulted in the formation of the Football Association in 1863.

There still remained a divide between the kickers of Eton and Harrow and the handlers of Rugby. Dunning and Sheard suggest that this in part was a battle between two codes, one of which (the kicking version) was seen as more civilised than the other, although the major point of contention was the practice of *hacking* which involved kicking at the shins of an opponent.<sup>12</sup> Those in favour of outlawing this practice argued that it was necessary in order to make the game attractive to civilised society and to prevent it becoming solely a game for schoolboys with their rather wilder pastimes. Supporters of hacking led by F.W. Cambell of the Blackheath Club, felt that football would be emasculated and that it would lose the essential elements that made it the ideal sport for an English Gentleman. As he explained in a rather chauvinistic fashion:

I think that if you do away with it you will do away with all the courage and pluck of the game, and I will be bound to bring over a lot of Frenchmen who would beat you with a week’s practice.<sup>13</sup>

By the fourth meeting of the FA, those clubs whose players wanted to continue with the Rugby School version of the rules had withdrawn and continued to play their game for a further eight years without a central body. To some extent a battle



line had been drawn to further establish the dominant sporting practice of football. Participation in the association version of football had become codified and civilised in contrast to its earlier forms, but rugby was still relatively violent.

Rugby has had a changing relationship with hegemony since it became one of the extra-curricular activities at Rugby School (See Appendix 3). At that point the football played at Rugby school was broadly in line with the rest of sport, it was disorganised, unruly and violent and was therefore part of the dominant hegemony. By the time the FA was formed in 1863, although rugby had remained relatively unchanged, it was no longer in step. Rugby could therefore be considered to be *residual hegemony*. That is, a mode of behaviour that once conformed to the norm and had survived with its practices unaltered despite changes to the dominant culture. The sport had become an anachronism and may in fact be considered to have been in direct contrast to the dominant hegemony (in the same way that dog fighting may be considered a form of residual hegemony in current society). In its very early days as an organised sport, rugby demonstrated resilience to the civilising process that was occurring in sport to such an extent that there was real concern that such a violent sport was not really suitable for a gentleman.<sup>14</sup> At Rugby School, the birthplace of the sport, the use of iron clad boots for this purpose was only banned in 1845 and it is clear that for many people, rugby was a sport which had no place in contemporary society. Spectators of a game among Old Rugbeians in Liverpool in 1855 were asked if this new sport was “... a worthy manner for gentlemen to employ themselves on a Saturday afternoon.”<sup>15</sup>

This period has been described as one where sport was in transition, with the traditional sports of England in decline there were a number of different sports



competing for acceptance in the new more refined society.<sup>16</sup> If rugby was to become a major sport and not just a peripheral one, it would have to change to fall more in line with the mores of the time. The major point of contention remained the significant amount of legalised violence within rugby. Once the rugby-playing clubs had withdrawn from the Football Association, the sport lost some of the respectability that football was now achieving. Football fitted in with the philosophy of the period as it enabled gentlemen to demonstrate their prowess in a controlled environment.

Just as sports were in a state of flux and new ways of playing were being explored, so the distinction of who should play was also identified. The professionals of the previous era had contributed to the decline in the popularity of sport. A means of preventing a similar distaste for the new sports was essential. The idea of playing for fun and not reward was an emergent concept at this time and would become the dominant philosophy within a few years. An important factor in the hegemony of the amateur ideal was the homogeneity of the elite of late 19<sup>th</sup> Century Britain. The men had a similar background via the public school system, the differences between the upper and middle class had therefore become blurred and the attitudes of these 'Gentlemen' were remarkably similar. The middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century had seen the bourgeoisification of sport. The disorganised and random patterns of the past had been replaced by a formalised and codified version, which was more in line with the demands of an industrial society that prided itself on its civilised nature. Therefore, sport had to adhere to spatial and temporal limitations, as well as to impulse canalisation, that is, the emotions of the players had to be under control as they indulged in a form of mock battle.<sup>17</sup> The notion of gentlemanly conduct, which had been re-invented from its

mediaeval meanings, was of the utmost importance. Originally, only those of noble birth could consider themselves to be Gentlemen. However, the title had undergone a process of democratisation and now referred more to an attitude and a mode of behaviour, although there were limits to this process, which excluded those who were from the lower ranks of society. Being a Gentleman involved notions of manliness and vigour, self-restraint and courage and sport was an ideal method of proving not only manly prowess, but also gentlemanly qualities.

In similar circumstances to the Football Association, the Rugby Football Union was formed following an appeal by a letter to *The Times* calling for a meeting to set common rules for all players. Shortly after this letter appeared, interested parties attended a meeting at the Pall Mall Restaurant in January 1871. It was the task of three Rugby Old Boys, A.E. Rutter, E.C. Holmes & L.J. Maton, to draw up the 'Laws' as they were to be called. It is from this time that the history and development of the organised version of the sport of rugby football can be traced and from this point that rugby began once again to step in line with the dominant sporting culture.

For many players the game of rugby had developed into a sport which enabled young men to demonstrate their bravery, fortitude, strength and determination and so had very strict mores about who should do what on the field of play.<sup>18</sup> There were twenty on each side and the teams were made up of thirteen forwards. They were not expected to handle the ball, but to keep it in the scrum and use their strength and technique to drive the opposition forwards and dribble the ball forwards in formation, almost like a great 52 legged crab. If the ball were kicked through this melee, then it would be picked up by one of the three halfbacks who were expert 'dodgers' and strong runners. They were expected to

run with the ball under one arm as far as they could, passing was considered to be 'bad form'. There was only one three quarter who was there primarily to tackle one of the halfbacks if they ran through. Finally, there were three backs that had purely defensive roles, almost the equivalent of goalkeepers in soccer. They were expected to tackle and drop kick the ball to touch as the rather easier method of punting was again considered to be bad form. That rugby was a game for gentlemen can be seen not only by the emphasis on what was considered correct behaviour, but also by the absence of penalties (which did not appear in the Laws until after 1881) and referees.<sup>19</sup> Rugby matches, it was considered, required umpires who would adjudicate only if the players could not agree.<sup>20</sup>

The first rugby international was played on 27 March 1871 between Scotland & England (although this match had been organised before the Pall Mall meeting, as a direct result of the first soccer international played between the same two sides the previous year). The controversy over hacking had continued, but in keeping with the desire within society for more civilised behaviour, it was gradually dying out. There remained those die-hards for whom a game of rugby was not complete without a real opportunity to prove their masculinity by giving and receiving pain without complaint. Until the late 1870s, some clubs had the final five minutes of matches as tributes to the tough old days by allowing hacking known as 'Hallelujah'.<sup>21</sup> At Rugby School the practice continued until the 1880s and the death of a player at Richmond in 1870 (although not directly connected to hacking) further fuelled the fire of opponents of the code.<sup>22</sup> It was finally accepted that hacking could play no part in a civilised sport.



**Storming 1871-1895**

As rugby was predominantly a game played by those who had gone to public schools, records from 1871 show there was low participation by the working class with rugby being played primarily by upper and upper-middle class men based in and around London.<sup>23</sup> As a large, capital city, London was almost bound to have a large concentration of former pupils of those schools and universities that had played rugby football. They did not need to form many clubs in order to play a satisfactory number of matches and they were able to maintain a high degree of exclusivity, keeping out those from lower status schools or of the wrong class. In 1873, there were nineteen clubs in London that were connected to schools, six connected to hospitals and two to the civil service and law. These were professions, which were likely to be dominated by ex public schoolboys.<sup>24</sup>

By the late 1880s, this picture had changed. Local businessmen and industrialists had founded a number of northern clubs that tended to be rather more diverse, drawing their players from a wider range of social classes. Thus rugby had undergone what has been described as *democratisation*.<sup>25</sup> This, it is argued, was not merely due to the fact that the sport was now approved by more of the population, but that it now had the involvement of those who had not been through the socialisation process of public school and university and therefore did not hold the same values. Rugby was no longer being played by a homogeneous elite and was therefore subject to influences of change. There had been a number of law modifications in the 1870s, which were partly due to increasing player frustration at prolonged mauls and partly due to spectator demand for greater entertainment.<sup>26</sup> The early form of scoring in matches had the 'goal' as the main form of scoring with the 'try' only counting if all else was equal. Therefore in 1879, although



England scored a try, it was the conversion that counted and this was equalled by a drop goal for Scotland and the match ended in a draw. As early as 1886 it was recognised that not awarding any points for a player touching down in the opponents in-goal area, but merely allowing a 'try' at goal, did not reward running and enterprise. From this point on, a differential scoring system was devised which recognised tries, penalty conversions and drop goals. Over the years the relative value of these methods of scoring has changed. In 1886 the try was valued at only one point, with a conversion worth three. The value of a try was doubled in 1892 and the conversion increased to three points, the same as a penalty. This was quickly changed in 1894 to three points for a try and two points for a conversion.

Rugby had developed in the north in much the same way as it had in the south, with the establishment of clubs by Old Rugbeians in Liverpool and Manchester. Clubs were set up in Leeds, Halifax, and Hull and in a number of small Yorkshire towns and villages. In the cities it was the ex-grammar schoolboys who dominated the clubs, whilst in the less populated countryside, membership of the clubs was drawn from a wider population.<sup>27</sup> Although these clubs were set up under the initiative of those who would consider themselves to be 'gentlemen', they were of a lower class than their southern counterparts and came from business, industrial or clerical sections of society rather than the professions.<sup>28</sup> There were a number of factors that contributed to the democratisation of rugby in the north of England. In the regions there was a lower density of Gentlemen within the population as compared to London and it was no longer possible to maintain the same exclusivity of the game. With teams of twenty a side, clubs could not be so selective in whom they allowed to join or whom they played against and quickly became 'open' clubs. Another factor was its attraction to certain parts of

the working class as a rather rough game, enabling more physical contact than soccer, its close rival. This sport had been organised slightly longer and had set out almost evangelically to spread its message to the lower classes and as a faster, simpler and more visually attractive game, this code of football had a definite advantage. Soccer was also the game that was used by the clergy as a means of taking the message of Christianity to the poor. Rugby may have been considered to be too violent a sport to be used in such a fashion.<sup>29</sup> There remained those, however, for whom traditional concepts of masculinity such as toughness and strength prevailed and so in the mining and industrial areas rugby found a welcoming home. Rugby can therefore be viewed as a sport that was eminently suitable for the workers in industry. "Sport provided pleasure where work did not, and the more strenuous the physical labour, the more strenuous the physical release it demanded."<sup>30</sup>

The clubs themselves, as in soccer, became part of the social fabric of the local communities and with the traditional community spirit and partisanship of the north, matches became focal points for their sense of identity. The attitude of these men and the working class players in their teams was rather different to that of the gentleman amateurs from the south. The working class had a long tradition of sporting competition that emphasised winning, gambling and material rewards. They found some of the sports emerging from the middle class to be attractive and suited to their concept of manliness, but they had little regard for the broad concept of amateur values. The northern teams wanted competition and tangible rewards and in line with this view, it was cups and leagues they saw as being essential to the game, not the cosy (and to the northern teams rather meaningless) friendly fixture that the southern clubs insisted upon. The Yorkshire Challenge

Cup was established in 1877 and was followed by cup competitions in Northumberland and Durham (1880) and Cumberland (1882). Continuing the trend set by the Football League (also formed primarily by the northern soccer clubs) the success of these cup competitions led to the formation of the Yorkshire Senior Competition in 1892, rugby's first league. Within two years this league had four divisions and the Lancashire version had three.

The experience of soccer suggested that as soon as leagues began, the pressure to succeed led to the need to recruit the best players. If this meant finding them jobs, paying them for time missed at work or even paying them to play, then there would be those who would enable this to happen.<sup>31</sup> By the 1890s, the stronghold of rugby was undoubtedly in the north of England and the first British tour party that went to Australia in 1888 had a contingent of 16 northern-based players in a party of 21.<sup>32</sup> Yorkshire won seven of the first eight county championships, with Lancashire winning the other one, due partly, it is argued, to the fact that they were paying their players for time missed at work.<sup>33</sup> The introduction of cups and leagues is a further example of the democratisation process, but formalised competition was not part of the original ideals of the rugby-playing gentlemen. It was felt that such competition in the form of cups and leagues would inevitably lead to:

...a fictitious sort of keenness, which is only too apt to lead to tricks of all descriptions...The executives of clubs will in the first instance do anything lawful to win. Next they will do what is doubtfully lawful. They will use inducements to procure recruits wherever they can get them and these inducements are apt very soon to pass the limits of fair persuasion.<sup>34</sup>

In the north the sport became commercialised in so far as admission was charged for matches and fixtures were arranged which would draw large crowds. In such a climate and given the different attitudes of the working class, it was



almost inevitable that players would become involved in the financial process, either through material inducements to join a club or by being supported financially for time missed from work in order to play. This, it has been argued, was part of the ‘proletarianization’ and ‘bourgeoisification’ of the game in Lancashire and Yorkshire.<sup>35</sup> Rugby in the north was moving in the same direction as soccer; it was becoming a professional sport and was therefore to some extent classless. The line between the “unpaid members of the privileged class and the paid members of the underprivileged class”<sup>36</sup> was being eroded. It enabled players from various walks of life to play with and against each other in a manner that was not possible when the working class players could not afford to miss their shift at work.

The wealth of some of these gate-taking clubs, the dominance of northern clubs on the field of play and the eminence of northern based players in the England team, gave the northern based administrators growing power within the national organisation. There was a real possibility that the bourgeois and proletariat attitudes could prevail over those of the amateur gentlemen in the same way that soccer had become dominated by the professional players. For most of the upper and upper-middle classes, the amateur ethos was the essence of sport and those who had been instrumental in the development of rugby as an amateur sport were not about to allow it to be ‘corrupted’ by those who did not fully embrace the concept. It was an issue that was not unique to rugby and was as much about class distinctions as it was about money.

The amateur ethos was the dominant form in sports participation in this period. All the major sports had adopted an attitude emphasising the amateur concept, however the universal belief in amateurism was under threat from within.



The new form of professionalism was different to the previous version, which was based very firmly on informal competition, gambling and patronage. The new professionals were still from the lower classes but were within mainstream sports and were paid for performance rather than simply results. They were being paid for their expertise and the benefits that their skills could bring to a team. Professional sport in this era could therefore be termed as an emergent concept and one that later became the dominant form. Rugby was now firmly in line with the dominant hegemony of sport and, in line with other major sports, was determined to retain the amateur concept. In football, the FA had tried to stop the spread of professionalism but by the 1880s, the FA had decided that to legislate and control professionalism was a more realistic alternative; a task that was accomplished by establishing a maximum wage and strict registration system. This kept the power within the clubs and ensured the players remained working class. The FA Amateur Cup was established for those who wished to retain the purity of the sport. Another sport, which accepted professionals but sought to control them, was cricket. This sport had a long history of association with professionals, who had typically been employed to do the hard graft of bowling, while the amateurs concentrated on batting. The professionals were very much kept in their place, with separate entrances to grounds and a requirement to undertake the menial tasks. It was largely social rank that determined professional status and this was highlighted by the accepted behaviour of Dr. W.G. Grace who was a Gentleman and therefore an amateur. When he toured with England, Grace insisted on having a locum to cover his practice and had his claret bill paid. He received £1,500 in expenses when he toured Australia in 1873, while the professionals were paid only £170. Although Grace was not really wealthy enough to completely embrace true amateurism

whilst still playing cricket full time, an exception was made for him and his kind that was not afforded to the less gifted or the lower social orders.<sup>37</sup> The unfairness of this system, where the expenses paid to the amateurs was more than the wages of the professionals, was highlighted in 1896. Five professionals in the England team went on strike asking for £20 (the average weekly wage at this time was just under £2 per week) for the match against Australia at the Oval instead of the £10 offered. Harry Wood, the Surrey wicket keeper, emphasised the point:

Oh, if I had only been born an amateur ... If I had taken to cricket as a 'gentleman' I should by this time have made sufficient out of my 'expenses' to enable me to retire. Strange, isn't it, that the professional cricketer drifts into poverty, whilst the 'gentleman' - who, of course, plays only for love of the game - makes pots of money at it.<sup>38</sup>

Other sports also established their own methods of dealing with professionals in this period. Lawn Tennis was played almost exclusively by the elite of society on their privately owned courts and so had no requirement to legislate against professionals. Two sports which were draconian in their approach were rowing and athletics. Rowing, from its early days as an organised sport, excluded those who earned their living through rowing and although this may seem to be a fair and rational decision, it quickly became an issue of class when they went on to exclude anyone who was a mechanic, artisan or labourer. The Amateur Athletic Club had similar views and defined an amateur as 'any gentleman' in 1868, however references to artisans and labourers were dropped when it became the AAA. Non-gentlemen were still excluded whether they had received money or not. Athletes from Oxford University however, who regularly had bets on the outcome of their races, were allowed to compete. It was social status not remuneration that was used as the criterion for amateur status. The hypocrisy of this position is exemplified by the treatment of two players from different social

backgrounds. A.E. Stoddart was a gentleman amateur who represented England at cricket and rugby and was Captain of the first overseas rugby tour to Australia and New Zealand in 1888. Stoddart was already in Australia having just finished a cricket tour there and received £200 expenses.<sup>39</sup> J.P. Clowes, who played rugby for Halifax, was invited to join this unofficial rugby tour to Australia. An agent of the organisers offered him £15 in order to buy some clothes for the trip. When this was revealed by Dewsbury RFC shortly before their cup game against Halifax, Clowes was declared a professional and was, therefore, ineligible to play in the cup match and unable to take his place on tour.<sup>40</sup> Taken at a glance, these amounts may seem to be insignificant, however, they convert in modern value to £13,000 for Stoddart and £1,000 for Clowes. The latter was certainly sufficient to purchase clothes and both were clearly being well rewarded for their efforts. This hypocrisy is further illustrated by the attitudes of clubs from the south towards what they considered to be legitimate expenses. Visiting the north was an opportunity to make the most of the crowds that they would draw. Blackheath claimed £4 per player for a game against Bradford in 1887 (£260 at today's values) and Corinthians, the soccer club who were held to be the byword in amateurism, charged expenses of £150 (£10,000) per match.<sup>41</sup>

In rugby, the success of Yorkshire teams, often from small towns and villages and consisting of players who were clearly not 'gentlemen', must have been wounding to the establishment in London. It became apparent that these teams were indulging in training sessions, in itself totally contrary to the amateur ideal. However, there were also strong rumours of players being found employment by their clubs and some players would even return to the dressing rooms after games and find money had been left in their pockets.<sup>42</sup> An objection to payment was not a



standpoint totally monopolised by those in the south. Ironically, it was Yorkshire that was originally most vigorous in the defence of amateurism and that first adopted rules on professionalism in 1879, when they determined that any 'gentleman' who found himself out of pocket could claim expenses. The RFU did not make a ruling on the issue until 1886, which would appear to give lie to the theory that it was industrialists and businessmen from the north who deliberately set out to commercialise rugby. It is more likely that the opposite is the case, as any entrepreneur would welcome the fact that a potentially attractive form of entertainment could be organised with the performers seeking little or no reward (this is one of the reasons why in 1995 rugby union made an attractive proposition for Rupert Murdoch as the players could be bought for relatively little). The administrators of northern rugby were at first staunchly supportive of the amateur ethos. However, as the game in Yorkshire and Lancashire came to depend more and more on the working class for players and spectators, they had little choice but to go along with these proletarian attitudes to sport. It is likely that many of these administrators had been born locally, gone to a local grammar school (rather than being sent away to Public School) and had their work place and home in the area. As such, they had stronger roots than their southern counterparts and therefore displayed more loyalty to their clubs. An example of the conflict between the two groups and the different approaches to rugby can be seen in the career of a largely forgotten player, Dicky Lockwood, who was by contemporary accounts, one of the best rugby players of his generation. He was almost certainly the best English back playing at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and captained his country, yet his name did not appear in the official history of the RFU in 1955. The reason for this omission may be due to the fact that he was a northern working class player who was



suspected of receiving payment for playing. Renowned as a skilful runner and kicker and one of the most powerful tacklers in the game, Lockwood first came to prominence as a 17-year-old playing for Dewsbury and gained rather more unwelcome attention when he transferred to local rivals Heckmondwike in 1884. They were an ambitious club and were accused of poaching the best players by the use of strictly illegal financial or material inducements. When the rumours that Lockwood was receiving £1 per match surfaced, the Yorkshire Rugby Union, who at this time were staunch supporters of the amateur code, investigated the matter. They were unable to find any evidence against him and so he was acquitted. The case against Heckmondwike and their offers of inducements to players was clearer cut however and they were suspended for three months. Despite a later attempt by a full RFU investigation, no evidence of any wrongdoing was ever proven against Lockwood. His acquittals were greeted with great cheers amongst the hundreds of his supporters who gathered to hear the verdict. In the 1890s he came to symbolise the rise of the working class players and the development of rugby away from its public school roots. He became the captain of Yorkshire (1892) and then captain of England (1894), but he was also a symbol of the power struggle between the north and south as his supporters felt his talents were often overlooked in favour of the more establishment players. This discrimination against the working class was further demonstrated when, although captain of his country, Lockwood withdrew from the team to play in Scotland as he could not afford the time off work to travel. His request to the RFU to be permitted to play for his club in a home match was denied, despite the precedence set the previous year when an Eton housemaster in similar circumstances had been allowed to play for Harlequins. The northern players and administrators saw this as another example of the bias of the RFU

against the working class base of the sport. Given his treatment and his financial situation, it is not difficult to perceive that Lockwood would decide to join the fledgling Northern Union on its inception in 1895. He became captain of Wakefield Trinity but his professional career was short due largely to injury problems. Lockwood soon retired from rugby and due to the debts he ran up as a failed publican, he was declared bankrupt in 1897. He worked as a labourer for the rest of his life and died in 1915. Just as in war, the history is written by the victors, so in rugby the history has been controlled by those who have the power to ensure that their version of events is prominent. Lockwood became a virtual non-person. In official histories of the RFU the achievements of some individuals may have been overlooked because of the taint of professionalism that overshadowed their accomplishments as players.<sup>43</sup>

With their different attitudes towards competition and the concept of amateurism, a power struggle between the pragmatic needs of the north and the lofty ideals of the south soon developed. It was the outcome of this power struggle that essentially determined how rugby union was to be organised for the next 100 years.

### **The Great Schism**

The causes of the split into the two Unions and ultimately two very different games, has been variously ascribed to a North Vs South battle; a power struggle for control of the game; a class war; differing economic priorities and as part of the continuing debate between amateur ethos and professional needs. The likely truth is that it was a combination of all these factors. The rather simplistic myth that it was the greedy northerners that had to be repelled by the noble southern defenders of the faith of true sportsmanship, is the one that for many people has prevailed.

This in part is due to the media representation of the game in the years since the split, which suggested that the northerners got the game they deserved, a rather less glamorous version of rugby, one which was portrayed as “designed to suit the aspirations of a brutalised proletariat.”<sup>44</sup> The working class player was certainly not wanted in the early years and, as in cricket, was less favoured when it came to claiming expenses. As one of the leading figures in Yorkshire rugby suggested in 1886: “If they cannot afford to play then they should do without the game.”<sup>45</sup>

The RFU was determined that they would retain the authority of the sport and eradicate any instances of what they regarded as professionalism. The struggle for control of the RFU had begun in some ways as early as 1882, with a proposal that the AGM be held alternately in the north and south. This was defeated and although it was proposed again at the 1891 meeting and received a majority of the votes, it failed to get the 66% needed for the change.<sup>46</sup> This defeat would have a significant effect later, as the failure to get enough delegates to the 1893 AGM, was a significant factor in the outcome of the vote on broken pay. It may well have been passed if the meeting had been held in the north, where it would have been more difficult for the southern delegates to attend in such great numbers. The potential power of the north and particularly Yorkshire can be seen from the fact that Yorkshire had 150 of the 350 clubs affiliated to the RFU.<sup>47</sup> However, not all of the administrators from the north were in favour of any drift towards professionalism. The reality of the situation was that broken time payment had become so much a necessity for many clubs with large numbers of working class players. For these players, Saturday was much the same as any other day and if they wanted to miss part of a day to play rugby, they had to forfeit part of their wages. The laws that had been drafted by those who could take time off whenever they wanted, were not



practical for the working man. Even those administrators who were amateur at heart had been forced to bow down to the weight of opinion from their members and accept the situation or lose their players and perhaps see the demise of the club. In an attempt to avoid continued confrontations and faced with little alternative, the Yorkshire Union submitted a proposal to the 1893 AGM.

That players be allowed compensation for bona fide loss of time.<sup>48</sup>

To this suggestion the President and Honorary Secretary of the RFU proposed an amendment,

That this Meeting, believing that the above principle is contrary to the true interest of the Game and its spirit, declines to sanction the same.<sup>49</sup>

The fact that the amendment was carried by 282 votes to 136 votes was seen in some quarters as the victory of good over evil and victory was ascribed to a combination of brilliant tactics and northern small town mentality. The fact that the northern clubs were transporting their supporters on two special trains was in itself evidence of the power of money, but this ploy lost some of its effect when some of them got lost making their way to the meeting. This was described in the RFU Centenary Celebration book as due to the “country bumpkin” characteristics of the delegates.<sup>50</sup> It was particularly the shrewd tactics of H.E. Steed who organised 120 proxy votes for the amendment on behalf of those who could not attend the meeting. He also ensured that Oxford and Cambridge Universities helped sway the vote on the side of amateurism as they were given a vote for each college instead of just one per University side. The working class clubs were unable to translate their playing and financial powers into political power, as their belief in professional sport was not enough to hold them together. Local loyalty and inter club jealousy, which was made more significant because of the seriousness of the cup and league



fixtures, led to a lack of real unity between the northern clubs and there were a number of accusations of illegal payments coming from northern clubs further weakening their position. The middle class clubs were able to mobilise what has in other realms been described as the 'old boys network' and ensured that their way of playing rugby was maintained.

From 1893 the power of the Union was very much based in the south and can be seen by the fact that there were no Yorkshire players in the England team of 1894/5, presumably because they were considered to be tainted by professionalism. Within two years, in August 1895, the northern clubs believed that they had no alternative but to leave the RFU and to form their own Northern Football Union. This had been agreed at a meeting of twenty-two clubs in Leeds three weeks previously. Whether the vote was a true representation of the feelings nationally at the time is open to question. What is not in doubt is that it was to influence the way rugby was played for the next one hundred years. For the clubs in the Northern Union it was generally believed that what they had done was correct and as one supporter suggested, "it was far better for the northern clubs to belong honestly to a Union that allowed broken time than to continue making payments illicitly under the RFU."<sup>51</sup>

Despite their freedom to choose their own path, the Northern Union tried to ensure that the game remained largely true to many of the ideals of amateurism. This suggests that the hegemony of the amateur concept was very powerful and that it was very difficult to totally dismiss it and establish a fully professional sport. As a result, it was only broken time that was an allowable expense and so full professionalism was avoided. Laws were introduced which were strictly enforced to try to maintain the status quo, with the payment for broken time

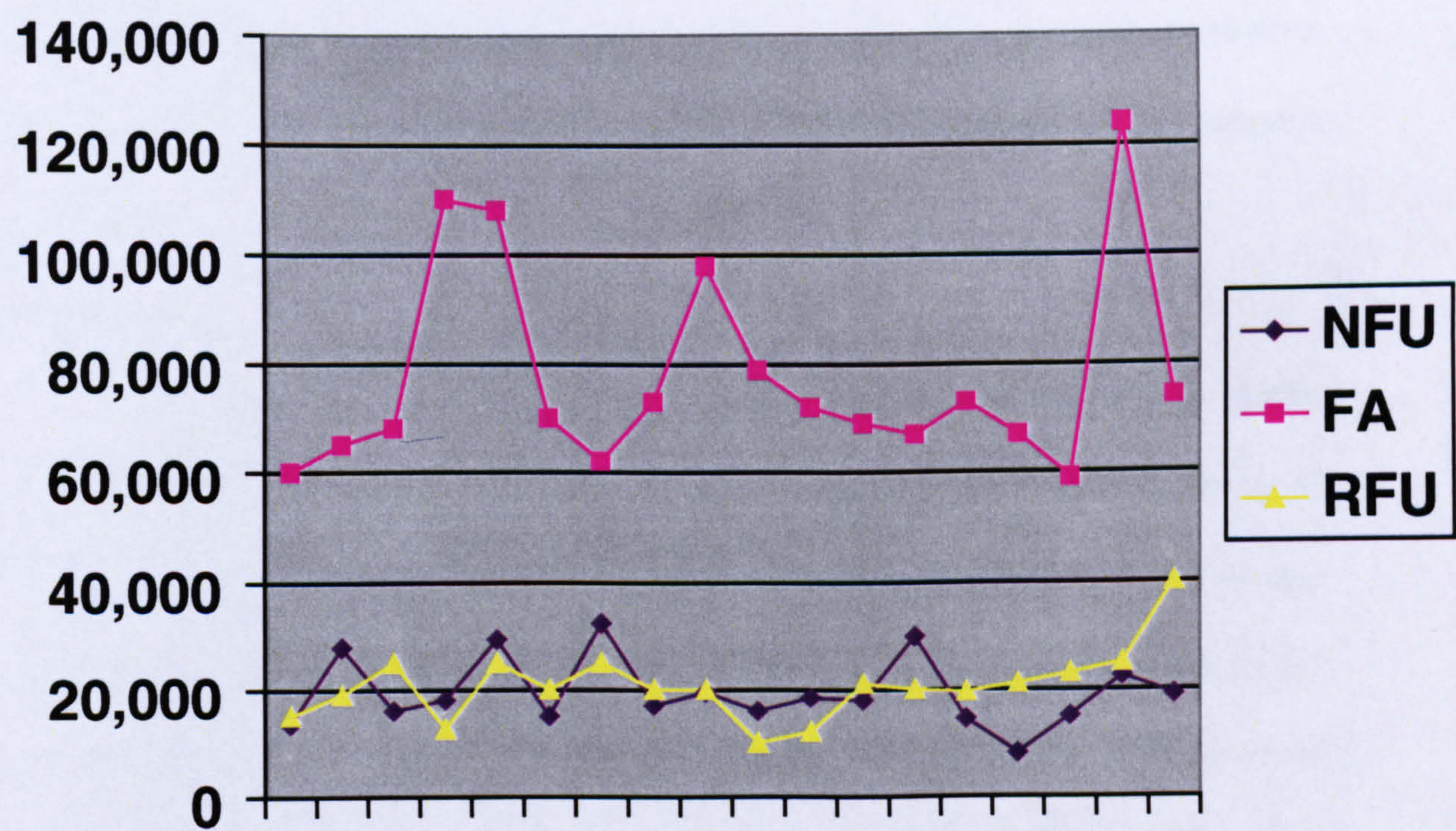
limited to six shillings a day. The players had to have a full-time job and to prevent any attempt to provide players with fake jobs, certain occupations such as working in pubs and billiard halls or as bookies' runners were prohibited. There was also a maximum roster of players to prevent the wealthier clubs from having a monopoly on talent and to prevent the poaching of players; a one-year residential qualification was enforced. For some observers this may have seemed rather incongruent, the clubs that had left the Union over a dispute about professionalism were now trying to find their own way through the maze that they themselves had helped to create. By 1905, they had relaxed the rule about full-time employment and with it any attempt to limit the wages had gone.<sup>52</sup>

Some of the Northern Union clubs thrived and an examination of average attendances at the finals of the various cup competitions before the First World War shows the attraction of the sport (see Appendix 4). During this period the Challenge Cup averaged almost 20,000 spectators, the Lancashire Cup and Yorkshire Cup around 15,000. The following graph shows the popularity of the game in the north and compares the attendances at the Northern Union Cup Final with that of the FA Cup Final and the average home attendance for England in the Rugby Union Championships.<sup>53</sup> It should be noted that in this period neither Cup Final had a regular venue and that most grounds would have a far lower capacity than modern stadia. The Rugby Union had been playing international matches at various venues, notably the Oval and Crystal Palace. In this period, the match between two club sides from the Northern Union was just as great an attraction as a full international in the Union code. But both of these codes fell a long way short of the crowds at soccer's premier match. The popularity of rugby as a spectator occasion also demonstrates the power that the northern clubs held and the real



threat that they posed to the RFU. For some clubs, competition with the more organised Football League and perhaps the lack of an established hard-core of support, meant they either had to revert to the amateur code or struggled to stay in existence. None of the clubs outside the north remained with the Northern Union by the time it became the Rugby League in 1922. Some of the clubs who formed the original twenty-two went on to be giants of the game: St Helens, Wigan, Leeds and Castleford. Others such as Brighouse Rangers and Manningham went out of existence.

Graph to compare attendances at major matches 1897-1915





For the controllers of rugby union compromise was not acceptable, but the move towards a professional game in the north of England had grown too strong to be resisted and so 'The Great Schism' of 1895 saw the game split in two. From this moment there was total impasse, with the Rugby Football Union resisting all attempts to allow professionalism. This refusal to allow the sport to develop to a form that reflected the changes in society meant that when change did come later it was in the form of revolution rather than evolution. The rift left a legacy that meant that rugby union was determined to be the absolute antithesis of a professional game. If the two sides had been able to reach some form of compromise before the two codes drifted too far apart, (as was proposed by some clubs in the Northern Union in the early 1900s), then rugby may have emerged as a professional sport at a much earlier stage. The presence of a powerful alternative version as an all too visible enemy led the RFU to establish an intransigent position.

### **Norming**

The Schism left the RFU as the real defenders of amateurism and the purity of sport. Once the dissenters from the North had been removed, the hegemony of amateurism was firmly re-established and the fact that there was now an avenue for the working class to play rugby left the Rugby Union firmly in the hands of the middle and upper classes. The RFU could now forcefully promote the amateur ideal and use coercion to maintain the line, as the laws that regulated amateurism following the 1895 Schism were explicit in their desire to prevent any form of payment to players. The 27 rules set out to ensure that individuals and clubs could not repeat the process that had led to the split (see Appendix 2). Professionalism was declared illegal and broadly defined as:



Asking, receiving, or relying on a promise, direct or implied, to receive any money consideration whatever, actual or prospective, any employment or advancement, any establishment in business, or any compensation whatever for playing football or rendering any service to a football organisation; training or loss of time connected therewith; time lost in playing football, or in travelling in connection with football, expenses in excess of the amount actually disbursed on account of reasonable hotel or travelling expenses.<sup>54</sup>

The schism severely depleted the ranks of the RFU, although only twenty-two clubs originally seceded from the Union, others were forced to follow in order to preserve their lucrative fixtures and stay in existence. There were four hundred and eighty-one member clubs in 1895, this fell to three hundred and eighty three clubs in 1896 and it was to take a further thirty years before membership was at its pre-schism level. Even though the rigid adherence to the amateur principles weakened the sport in some areas and even cost England their place as the leading playing nation (most of the England team of the early 1890s came from northern clubs), it was a price they were willing to pay. Any attempts to move rugby towards professionalisation were firmly rebuffed and in 1900 an attempt by delegates from Bristol to set up a local league to try and combat the popularity of soccer had little chance of success. At the AGM: "Delegates spoke with one accord against the evils they knew must spring from the introduction of this system."<sup>55</sup> Wherever there was a suspicion of professionalism, the RFU would investigate it and inevitably it was clubs who drew on the working class that were under the greatest pressure. Clubs from the West Country recruited many of their forwards from agricultural backgrounds, but faced difficulties in preventing these players from being drawn to the professional game of the Northern Union. It was only by making illegal payments to players, that they were able to retain their services. An investigation by the RFU in 1911/12, led to the suspension and expulsion of players from Newton Abbot, Teignmouth, Torquay and Plymouth.

Because rugby in the West Country and the Midlands had become more spectator oriented, they came under close scrutiny from the RFU. As a result of this, Coventry was suspended in 1909 when it was revealed that broken time payments had been disguised as the cost of lemons and towels. They joined the Northern Union for a brief period in 1911, later returning to join the establishment and become one of the top clubs of the amateur era.<sup>56</sup> The existence of a rival union meant that a bolt hole was available for clubs who were in dispute with their own organisation and the next few years saw some traffic between the Unions, for example in 1907 Ebbw Vale and Merthyr Tydfil left the Welsh RFU after a dispute.

Although the regulations did not specifically ban those from the working class (as had earlier been the case in athletics and rowing) they did make it very difficult for anyone who was not from a privileged background to be anything more than a “dabbler” in rugby. As rugby became more popular with players and spectators, the issue of the amateur status of players was re-visited by the RFU and the IRB. The issue of testimonials (1896), expenses (1909), gifts (limited to £2 in 1923), paid coaches and trainers (1914) needed to be addressed early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. If it was to retain its credibility the RFU had to stand firm on these issues. Because the RFU were presiding over a sport that directly aligned itself with the dominant culture, it was supported by those in power and was able to further emphasise the hegemony of amateurism. The media was instrumental in continuing the belief that it was the amateur approach to sport that was the true way of playing. The author Max Pemberton who discussed the decline of sport in the Daily Mail in 1902, exemplifies the extent to which this emphasis on a pure version of sport was welcomed by the middle classes:



Those who know and love "Tom Brown" must often ask themselves what the great football players of a past day would think of the "hired ruffians" who delight great multitudes nowadays and of the waste of time engendered by their efforts...there is no firmer believer in all forms of manly sport than myself. Football I would number as one of our two great national games. And it is because I hold that professionalism with its frequent attributes of ruffianism and brutality will eventually destroy all that is best and to be desired in the science of football that I have protested against the new order.<sup>57</sup>

Although the entrepreneurial Northern Union made an attempt to establish themselves in these areas, they were unsuccessful and it was soccer that was the main beneficiary of the zeal of the RFU and it flourished at the expense of rugby, particularly in the Midlands. However, not all of the rugby community was in favour of such a robust approach to seeking out illegal payments. One of the leading England players of the pre-war era, Ronald Poulton, who was perhaps the archetypal rugby player of that era (he came from a public school background and was very wealthy), was firmly against investigations and expulsions such as those which took place in 1912 :

If it is the desire of the RFU committee practically to limit the game to players who learn it at Public Schools and in the Services and Universities, such a finding is reasonable. But I cannot believe such is their desire...such an action as the ...committee have taken will do much to prevent the expansion of the Rugby game.<sup>58</sup>

He may have been somewhat naïve in believing that the RFU were interested in making the sport more democratic and accessible to all. The sport of rugby football was defined for the next half a century by its staunch support for the amateur ethos. Rugby was to be played for the enjoyment of the players, and the spectators were expected to be knowledgeable enough to appreciate the nuances of a game that was not generally geared to non-participants. As an amateur sport, rugby union had no real need to attract spectators and so any laws that were amended were for the benefit of the players. The desire to provide an arena for



England matches indirectly led to the sport becoming more commercial. This unintended outcome of an intended action is evident in the consequences that developed from building a stadium for rugby. In 1906, the Committee of the Union asked the Finance Sub-Committee to look into the feasibility of purchasing a plot of land upon which to build a stadium for the exclusive use of playing rugby. As a result in 1907 a parcel of land of 10¼ acres was purchased near the town of Twickenham, 12 miles from London. Instigated by William Williams and having formerly been a market garden, the pitch became known locally as “Billy Williams' Cabbage Patch”. There were those who believed that trying to establish a stadium so far from London, in what was then little more than a market town, was folly. Over the years it has been the income generated from these matches that has kept the RFU solvent. However the costs involved in maintaining and developing ‘HQ’, increasingly contributed to the need to increase the revenue from the sport.

The RFU had established its membership and its mode of playing and resisted any attempts to change the laws in this period. When it was suggested in 1909 that players who were injured could be replaced, Major Trevor, main rugby reporter for the Daily Telegraph, took exception. He felt it would lead to ‘malinger’ amongst some players. He suggested that some players were already taking advantage of referees and pretending to be injured in order to take a rest and so gain unfair advantage:

It will then be time enough seriously to consider the substitute suggestion when we notice a return in the general tone to those more robust and healthier times when even a referee was not needed.<sup>59</sup>

By the time most sports ended their fixtures because of the outbreak of the Great War, the amateur/professional debate had been generally resolved. Each

sport had come to terms with professionals and the situation would remain largely unchallenged for the next half century. Within each class there were sporting challenges available and sport was established as being the major recreational activity for the male population. The Amateur Rowing Association was particularly hostile to any attempts to professionalise sport. They vigorously opposed suggestions that public funds should be raised to help athletes train for the 1912 & 1916 Olympics and indicated that they would rather have nothing further to do with the Olympic movement.<sup>60</sup> The Amateur Athletic Association was also suspicious of the IOC and also of the American scholarship system where athletes were offered financial incentives to join a specific University. Philip Noel-Baker, President of the Cambridge Athletics Club, outlined the differences between the British and American approaches in 1912 and it was these differences in attitude that were to be expanded over the next decades as the influence of American culture came to be felt more widely:

The American Athlete specialises in one or two events: before any race of great importance he devotes most of his time to training: he has a coach – often a professional: he is backed by an organisation...managed by paid organisers...supported by a reasonable amount of money.<sup>61</sup>

By this time, both soccer and cricket had compromised with their working class ‘professional’ players. Lord Hawke for example, had declared cricket to be ‘the true democracy’ because it allowed men from all classes to play the sport. His was a somewhat jaundiced view as professionals were kept firmly in their place. As cricket was their livelihood, the professionals adopted a very different attitude to the sport. In 1912, Sidney Barnes, (who was regarded by many as the best bowler of his day and who was still selected for Test Matches despite the fact he had ‘defected’ to League Cricket as it paid more), refused to play in the final Test in



South Africa as his promised sponsorship had not materialised.<sup>62</sup> Despite being somewhat 'tainted' by its association with the working class, the control by the Gentlemen of the game remained strong. This dominance of the amateurs remained until after World War II and therefore enabled cricket to contribute to the dominant hegemony. This was not the case with soccer. Despite the establishment of a 'rebel' Amateur Football Association which had been established in an attempt to preserve the morals of the sport, the amateurs were forced to concede defeat and re-join the FA in 1913. Although there were still a handful of amateur players who could compete with the professionals, it was widely accepted that it was the professional game which was the flagbearer of the sport and was the form the public wished to view and the real test of skill and prowess. For some of the traditionalists, it was the exposure to lower class values that had debased the sport.

As C.B. Fry commented in 1911:

A curious conventional morality has grown up under which it is regarded as legitimate to play against the rules and the referee as well as the opposing team...on the principle that as there is a penalty for cheating, it is permissible to cheat.<sup>63</sup>

There were few dissenters as to the importance of sport amongst the elite. One notable individual was Rudyard Kipling. He was dismissive of the upper and middle classes for their preoccupation with sport. It was this, he felt, that was largely responsible for the decline in Britain's military power (as shown in the Boer War) and he was particularly scornful of "flannelled fools at the wicket" and "muddled oafs at the goals".<sup>64</sup> He was supported in these beliefs by another author Max Pemberton, who also lamented the amount of time spent playing football. "We are told that on such fields Waterloo was won. It seems to me that it would be truer to say that on such Spion Kop was lost".<sup>65</sup> Their main fear was the power of Germany and the fact that sport was far less important to them, enabling more



time to be spent honing different skills. Teamwork and courage may have been central to the amateur ethos but it is difficult to envisage how the concepts of fair play and not appearing to care about winning would help in modern warfare.

The hegemony of amateurism would appear to be very much a middle class concept and the amateur concept during this period was undoubtedly a method of social exclusion and enclosure. It is perhaps because of the way rugby so wholeheartedly embraced the amateur movement and was not prepared to entertain any compromise, that rugby retained its role as a sport for Gentlemen. The epitome of the amateur ethos in rugby was the Barbarians Football Club. The Baa Baas are unique in that they are the only major club (in any code) that has no home, no ground, no subscriptions and membership is by invitation only. Conceived by William Percy Cantwell (Blackheath and Cambridge University) as a touring team, their purpose was to spread the word of rugby, enjoy the company of good men everywhere and play rugby without inhibition. In this respect they were the antithesis of the professional movement. Famously formed over an oyster supper in a Bradford restaurant in 1890, the Barbarians became the team for which all gentleman players wished to be selected. The title of the club itself was selected with reference to class distinctions that had been outlined by Matthew Arnold (Barbarians being the upper class who enjoy all that is sweetness and light). Because the club was elitist it served as a reminder of the way rugby was supposed to be played. Ability in itself was not sufficient for selection, it had to be married with the required attitude as ascribed by those who considered themselves gentlemen. Anyone with an attitude that would be considered professional was unlikely to be invited. And the annual Easter tour to Wales became legendary for good fellowship and good rugby :

I got better as I got older and toured with the Barbarians, played for England. I think the thing they miss now is the tours. I did the Bahamas, USA, even France for the weekend. It was almost like a rugby holiday. I think as amateurs we did have more fun, drinks after the match (and before in some cases) and there was a lot of camaraderie. When we played away in Wales we stayed overnight and had a good time afterwards and got to know people.

*Barry Corless*

It has been suggested that the rugby establishment was the most bourgeois of the three main team sports (rugby, soccer and cricket) and that it drew more of its members from the newer and lower status public schools.<sup>66</sup> It may have been, therefore, that these *nouveau riche* were less socially secure than their counterparts in cricket and football and so showed greater determination to exclude their inferiors, the working class, from their sport. This poem from 1911 shows that there remained a determination to uphold the spirit of the 1893 meeting:

When men advanced to mortal fray  
 For honour and renown  
 Their cause was good and in all love  
 They struck the foeman down.  
 But mercenary bandits came  
 And hired themselves for pay  
 They knelled the funeral of the game-  
 War saw its judgement day

Oh! Rugger men behold yourselves  
 The parallel we draw  
 And let no club again transgress  
 The Rugby Union Law<sup>67</sup>

When the RFU lost its working class players and clubs, there was little effective opposition, but in other countries the issue was less clear cut and shamateurism was an effective method of appearing to support the concept of amateurism. By the Great War, rugby was directly in line with the dominant form of sport and remained so for the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Although rugby was a minority sport, it was a socially superior one. It became the main sport for Public



Schools, socially aware grammar schools and Oxford and Cambridge Universities. Despite the criticism of the American Scholarship system, the importance of the Varsity rugby match meant that both Universities recruited gifted players from a select number of public schools and from the colonies. Gaining a Blue was a main route to international status for many players and the 1913 Cambridge XV contained eleven current and future internationals. Rugby Union was played with courage and with freedom of expression and with concern for the values of gentlemanly behaviour, sportsmanship and amateurism. Many players had other sporting interests and had consideration for their career outside of the sport and rugby was regarded as a hobby and a pastime. It was how you played that was of more concern than the result, hence the absence of cups and leagues; the friendly fixtures were established as central to club rugby. In England even international rugby was viewed as a relatively casual affair, with little regard for team training or tactics. Other countries had different views and after establishing the amateur values in England, the RFU now had the task of substantiating this in other countries.

### **Power struggle with other countries**

To further illustrate the role of class and culture in the institutionalising of the amateur ethos, it is necessary to examine the situation in the other rugby playing nations. Just as the RFU went through what has been termed the Forming, Storming & Norming stages with the clubs under its own jurisdiction, so it firstly had to establish control over its closest neighbours and later the southern hemisphere playing countries. In Scotland, soccer had drawn off most of the urban working class, leaving the game firmly in the control of the middle and upper classes. Most of the international rugby players came from the elite schools of



Edinburgh and Glasgow, with many of the leading teams being closed Old Boys (or Former Pupils) clubs. The more proletarian border clubs were too far away from centres of population to consider the lure of commercialism via gate-taking. Similarly in Ireland, the choice of football code was determined largely by class, although the situation was complicated by the additional choice of Gaelic Football. Rugby was a sport which crossed the political and religious divides.<sup>68</sup> In both these nations, rugby was controlled and played by those who considered themselves to be Gentlemen, and therefore firmly adhered to the amateur ethos. In Wales however, there was a more pragmatic approach to the question of payment to players. In the years immediately after the Schism and with the loss of so many of the top working class players, the dominance of England as a playing power was over, at least temporarily and it was Wales which became the leading country. Given the working class nature of the sport in Wales and the difficulties in dealing with the working class of northern England, over the years this must have given the RFU some cause for concern. In Wales, rugby pre-dated soccer by 20 years and suited the new population (which increased by one million people in the period 1871 to 1911). The game thrived largely due to the cluster of upwardly mobile English gentlemen who had moved to Wales to seek their fortune. Although these (largely) ex-public schoolboys accounted for only 3% of the population in 1910, they kept control of the development of industry - particularly coal and also controlled Welsh rugby.<sup>69</sup> The economy of Wales was more akin to that of the north of England and therefore the sport developed along similar lines. Consequently working class players dominated the sport and in many small towns and villages the rugby club became the centre of social life and identity. Rumours about players receiving money or other tangible rewards were fairly common,

proving such rumours however was virtually impossible as the communities were closely knit and showed themselves to be as adept as the Mafia at keeping silent. The RFU had far less power in Wales than it did in England and it was unable to exert the same authority in keeping the sport totally amateur. Although it was again the middle class who dominated the administration of the sport in Wales, it was its popularity amongst the working class which gave it strength. Rugby in Wales was classless in comparison with England, but in common with their English counterparts, the working men of Wales had little time for the amateur ethos. They had the same tradition of recreational activities which encouraged gambling and the unashamed pursuit of financial reward. It was, therefore, unrealistic to expect them to miss paid work to participate in organised physical activity without being remunerated. It became even more unrealistic later when the popularity of the sport enabled clubs to charge for admission and become profit making concerns.<sup>70</sup>

The WRFU was in a very difficult situation. If they enforced the amateur rules rigorously they would lose not only their position as the leading nation, but probably the sport would die, particularly when faced with competition from soccer. Equally, if they ignored the determination of England (still the most powerful nation by nature of being the first and having the most clubs, wealth and players) to maintain rugby as an amateur sport, they could have found themselves isolated. It would appear that they took the pragmatic route and largely ignored the problem and providing there was no proof, they decided that the clubs were adhering to the amateur code. When they did take action (possibly to appease the RFU) they generally used their authority against the lesser clubs, for example Aberman was expelled in 1901 for financial irregularities. As long as the WRFU



espoused the need for amateurism, there was little the RFU could do and although professionalism was officially banned in Wales, a compromise was reached between the anti-professional middle-class and the financially oriented workers. The controllers of rugby in Wales resisted outright professionalism but were prepared to overlook a certain amount of under counter payment in order to preserve the social function of rugby as a focus for the community. That players in Wales were able to receive payment for 'expenses' became an overlooked anachronism of the amateur ethos and the shamateurism of Welsh clubs was something of an open secret throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>71</sup> Poachers from northern union clubs were resisted strongly and a scout from Wigan was thrown in the sea at Penarth 1899, but the money available in Rugby League became an irresistible draw to some Welsh players.<sup>72</sup> The loss of some of their top performers who went 'North' became an unpleasant fact of life for the clubs. Despite this liberal interpretation of amateurism in Wales, the WRFU was still firmly aligned with their English counterparts and therefore played a significant role in retaining amateurism as a key concept.

By accepting the sport, all of the rugby playing nations had to accept the dominance of the RFU as the sole authority. Given the level of national pride in all of these countries, it is not surprising that they wished to establish the right to become involved in the decision making process. The first real challenge to the authority of the RFU came in March 1884 during the England v Scotland match when a Scottish player fisted the ball backwards which was intercepted by an England player who scored. After the game, the Scottish team argued on a point of law that the try should not have stood and they claimed the game. Their issue was over the interpretation of the knock-on law and that whether only one side could



appeal for a decision (at the time there were two umpires under the direction of a referee). Over the next eleven months there were 32 letters exchanged between G. Rowland Hill (Hon. Secretary to the RFU) and James Alex Gardner (Hon. Secretary Scottish RFU) over the disputed try and the interpretation of the law that led to it. The problem was that the RFU made the laws and therefore said they were the highest authority on the matter. As they were involved in the dispute, this seemed unfair to the Scottish RFU and matches between the two countries were suspended for two years. Finally the Scots conceded the point on the understanding that an International Board (IB) be instituted whose functions should be limited to “the settlement of any dispute which may arise in future International Matches on the *Construction of the Laws of the Game*.”<sup>73</sup> This was accepted by the RFU and a board was formed of the four Home Nations in March 1886 for that purpose. In October 1886, the RFU decided to adopt a new scoring system and informed the other countries. They declined to accept this and matches in 1886/87 were played under the old system. At the next meeting of the IB in March 1887, the old board was dissolved and a new one formed. It was stated that all International matches must be played under laws approved by the IB, which should consist of an equal number of representatives from each of the Unions. This was unacceptable to the RFU and they refused to join. It was then suggested (by the RFU) that matches should be played according to the laws of the home nation. At a special meeting of the RFU in February 1888, it was further suggested that although universal rules were needed, these should be formed by a majority of footballers regardless of nationality (i.e. power back to England). A counter-offer was made in which Ireland, Scotland, and Wales would have two representatives each and England would have three. As no alteration could be made to the laws

without a two-thirds majority, this was not acceptable to the RFU. The case was therefore taken to arbitration in February 1890.

Although faced with a possibility of becoming isolated, the RFU had authority from its traditional position as the founder Union that had framed the laws for fifteen years to the satisfaction of all. It also had power from the fact that the RFU had over 300 clubs compared to approximately 100 for the other countries. It was clear that any laws framed for international matches would inevitably be adopted for all matches and therefore the role of the RFU would be unsustainable. They suggested that the International Rugby Board (IRB) be formed with proportional representation, six from England and two from each of Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. The 75% majority needed to amend or draft laws gave the RFU an inbuilt majority and enabled them to retain power over the sport.<sup>74</sup> This was vital in a period when there were other countries who had different views about how the sport should be played and by whom. The authority of the IRB was severely tested in 1897 with the 'Gould affair'. Initially the IRB was true to its principles when it branded the Welsh captain Arthur Gould a professional and therefore banned him from any association with the amateur game. Gould had received £600 (£38,000 in 2000) from a testimonial sanctioned by the Welsh RFU, which had been used to buy the deeds to his rented house. Wales argued that as the IRB had no laws about amateurism it could not make any judgements about the affair and Wales withdrew from the IRB. Under pressure from the Welsh, the ban was rescinded later that year due to 'exceptional circumstances'. The Irish and Scottish Unions regarded this compromise (which effectively prevented the IRB from disbanding and which may have led to different factions in the sport) as unacceptable and both refused to play the Welsh the following season. Gould later



went on to appear in advertisements for chocolate (as did the amateur C.B. Fry) without receiving the punishment laid down in the Laws. For some, this case was the thin end of the wedge, and ‘Scrum’ writing in the Birmingham Sports Argus argued, “I have already several times pointed out the tendency, which exists in Wales of a drift towards professionalism and of the forces which are operating behind this tendency.”<sup>75</sup> The IRB amended this oversight regarding amateur status and formulated the following laws in 1900 and 1901:

Any player will become a professional who receives from or is given money or other valuable consideration by any person or persons as an inducement towards playing football...any player will become a professional who signs any form of the Northern Football Union.<sup>76</sup>

These laws are a clear indication that the RFU was in firm control of the IRB and had a general agreement that amateurism was central to Rugby Union. In 1909, the Scottish Union’s request for greater equality of representation of the four countries for all purposes was agreed. England gave up two seats and the board consisted of 10 members until 1948.<sup>77</sup> This gesture further emphasises that England felt it had achieved hegemony over these nations and felt secure enough to share power with them. Further afield, the globalisation of rugby, although limited to a few nations, created further debate on the issue of amateurism.

The process of globalisation does not have a zero starting point, but there was an increase in momentum between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries and a further acceleration at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Interwoven between the cultural and economic diffusion is sport, perhaps the only truly international language with its rules and traditions recognised all over the world. Baron de Coubertin was one of the first to recognise the potency of developing a global sporting culture when he resurrected the Olympic Games in 1896. The sportisation, which carried predominantly British sports to the rest of the world,



began at the end of the 19th Century and has continued unabated. There is little doubt that it was primarily the influence of predominantly English ex public and grammar schoolboys who helped the sport of rugby to develop in France, Scotland, Ireland and Wales. This continued later when Britain was the prime mover in the diffusion of rugby to other countries and it was in 1888 that the first British rugby touring side visited Australia and New Zealand. Cricket had pioneered this exportation of an important facet of British culture, sport, twenty years earlier. It was fuelled partly from a sense of wanting competition and developing the sport in other countries, partly from wishing to demonstrate the superiority of Britain over its colonies and partly from a desire for adventure. The tour itself lasted for seven months in addition to the time taken to travel to the other side of the world and back. They played thirty-five matches of rugby in this period and to further demonstrate the innate sporting prowess of the British player, they also participated in eighteen games of Australian Rules Football, winning six, losing eleven and drawing one.<sup>78</sup> A further tour followed to South Africa in 1891 and from this point the pattern was set and the British and Irish Lions continued to tour these three countries throughout the 20th Century. New Zealand and South Africa quickly proved themselves to be better than their 'masters' and became the dominant forces in world rugby. It is clear therefore why these eight nations were the primary rugby playing countries and until recently the only meaningful matches were those between these countries.

The role of the people in the receiving countries is an important aspect of the globalisation process. To what extent can this process be described as cultural imperialism? Were the people passive recipients or active participants and if they were active participants could they reject as well as modify and accept the external

culture?<sup>79</sup> In the USA, rugby was modified and became American Football, a game which was to become one of the major sports of that country.<sup>80</sup> Australia was another nation that adapted rugby to produce another form of the sport, Australian Rules Football. In those countries that adopted rather than adapted rugby, it would appear that this was largely through willing participation. There is little evidence to suggest that rugby followed the example of cricket in the Caribbean and India where they were forced to play the game on their master's terms.<sup>81</sup> This may partly be explained by the fact that in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, rugby was taken up not by the natives but by the dominant migrant population with their relative wealth and a desire to forge a culture of their own in a foreign land. In India, where the British encouraged the elite of the population to send their sons to English Public Schools and so promoted the hegemony of British culture amongst the ruling classes of India, the people took up the sport partly to show how British they were.<sup>82</sup> However rugby did not become popular amongst the general population of India. In 1876, the Calcutta Football Club had its assets turned into silver, melted down and reformed as the Calcutta Cup, which was eventually presented to the winner of the annual England versus Scotland match.

Those countries that adopted rugby used it to develop a sense of nationalism while at the same time maintaining links with Britain. Beating the British at sport became a way of unifying the nation and they soon found ways of selecting and funding their best players to achieve this aim. Thus it could be argued that rugby as a total concept, was peripheral to their culture. They embraced the playing elements of the sport with enthusiasm, but as their cultures were often vastly different from England with its class-dominated society, they were less enthusiastic about the amateur ethos. They were largely dependent in the early



years on support from England and therefore were reluctant to dispute the status quo of amateurism. However there was a constant redefining of the moral assumptions of the sport.

Further evidence of the challenge to British hegemony was shown in the way overseas teams approached the playing of the game, as it was seldom enough for them just to turn up and play. From a very early stage they were developing what might be called 'professional attitudes', as they developed tactics, fitness and techniques to enable them to perform to the best of their abilities. It was difficult for the governing bodies to do much about teams who developed strategies that would help them to achieve victory. Although the true amateur ethos stresses participation above victory, for the colonies particularly, victory at international level was desirable in order to demonstrate superiority over one's supposed masters. From the very beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century it has been the teams from the southern hemisphere that have set ever-higher levels of performance. In 1905, it must have been galling for the home nations to face a New Zealand XV that was technically decades ahead of them. In terms of fitness, teamwork and specialist forward play, the 'All Blacks' proved themselves to be far superior to the British sides.<sup>83</sup> It is doubtful that the British were impressed that their style led to increased interest in the club game. If they were, then they did very little about it, for it was still reported that in England, "the four three-quarters still chased each other into touch and spoiled the game as a spectacle."<sup>84</sup> Unencumbered as they were with the class based amateur ethos, the Springboks (South Africa), All Blacks and Wallabies (Australia) used rugby to demonstrate what their cultures were all about. They showed pride in performance, determination to win and a willingness to work at their skills and fitness and to develop strategies to a level far



beyond that of the moribund British sides. It was perhaps the way that their cultures defined amateurism and professionalism in a different way that allowed them to develop the game. As they were largely dependent in the early years on support from England, they may have been reluctant to openly challenge the authority of the RFU and their distance from the British Isles allowed them to develop their own sense of amateurism largely unheeded. As a result, their brand of rugby was imprinted with their own unique cultures, which included an emphasis on strength, power and a desire to strive for victory. When it was discovered that the New Zealand Rugby authorities were allowing substitutions before the First World War, the RFU immediately reminded them in the strongest terms that this was contrary to the amateur ethos. The amateur concept had to be explained and enforced once again, but this time the countries were too far away realistically to be controlled.

The IRB nations still needed each other and a truce of sorts was formed which enabled the Southern Hemisphere countries slowly to develop their definitions of amateurism and professionalism. It was only during the later years that this truce was to be tested and the concept truly challenged. In hindsight this period can be seen as a settling in period for the RFU and the IRB. They established their position and for the next eighty years it was the four home nations who attempted to keep the game free from any taint of professionalism. It was the power that the RFU held as the authority behind rugby that enabled them to keep France, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand in check. As the sport expanded worldwide, the power of the RFU within the IRB diminished in both real and authoritative terms and the southern hemisphere countries made moves to shape their own destiny.

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**CHAPTER 3**

**MAINTAINING POWER**



## **Introduction**

The period between 1918 and 1960, was ostensibly a time when little changed in rugby union. However, closer examination reveals that there were shifts in society's attitude towards the way that sport was played, as winning became regarded as more important. Changes in society such as improved transportation, communication and the blurring of class distinctions also had an impact on rugby. Although the RFU maintained control of the sport and there were no real challenges to the issue of payment for playing, the first minor changes in attitude to the broad concept of amateurism can be perceived during this period.

For the clubs there was a continuation of the tradition of friendly matches within carefully built up fixture lists. One of the effects of the large-scale desertion of the northern clubs was that rugby, with the exception of a few pockets dotted around England, had almost totally excluded the working class. This left a homogeneous group of rugby players who gravitated towards clubs where they felt comfortable amongst their 'own kind'. Gradually from each local area one or two clubs would become dominant. This may have been because they were Old Boys associations and their feeder schools paid particular attention to the place of rugby on the curriculum, or because a club had superior facilities such as clubhouse, changing rooms or playing surface. As clubs became known for their success within their area, so recruitment of better players became easier. This would perpetuate the club's position and lead to a degree of permanence. The improvements in transport during the 20th Century allowed top clubs from one area to test their prowess against similar clubs from other areas. These fixtures were guarded jealously and clubs became part of an un-official, but very seriously taken 'first-class' list, by the virtue of who they played. If a club had sufficient

fixtures against first-class opposition then they too were deemed to belong to the hierarchy. This became something of a self-perpetuating oligarchy. To break into this elite took many years of painstaking work by fixture secretaries and no small effort on behalf of the players. The continuation of a fixture against a first-class club required that each year they were given a contest worthy of their status. Without the status of 'Senior Club' it was difficult to attract the best players and a laborious process for aspiring clubs to improve their standing. Because of the amateur status of the sport, players would normally join a club close to their place of employment. Although there may have been those who sought out the club they wished to join before finding employment, there is no suggestion that there was any pattern of inducements at this time. The Senior Clubs tended to be concentrated around the major cities of the Midlands, the West Country and in London. There were pockets of top class rugby union clubs in the north to cater for those grammar schools and universities who maintained the union code, but the power that Yorkshire and Lancashire had developed in the previous century had been seriously eroded.

The only serious competition for rugby players came in the County Championship and International matches. The pattern of internationals remained the same as before the war, and the Five Nations Championship was the pinnacle of most players' ambitions, as tours to and from other countries were very irregular. The Home Nations and France considered themselves above fixtures with inferior rugby playing nations and so only fixtures with New Zealand, Australia and South Africa were considered. This was an attitude that continued into the modern era when international matches with countries outside the main eight nations were not considered worthy of the award of a cap. Further to this, the



only opportunity to tour was with the British and Irish Lions. These tours were usually several years apart, involved a squad of thirty players and were trips only the very best players could aspire to. Cliff Morgan was one player who realised how such an opportunity came rarely to most players: “You needed to hit the top at just the right time to be included once and you had to have a long international career to be asked a second time.”<sup>1</sup>

The Laws and the means of playing rugby remained, in essence, unchanged during this period and there were virtually no voices of dissent against the amateur code. The hegemony of amateurism had been firmly established through the various educational establishments, where those boys who learned the game had few notions that rugby could be played any way other than the union way. The other code was for their social inferiors and was widely portrayed in the media and in union circles as the substandard version. For most working class boys there was the option of playing rugby league if they did wish to play professionally and so there was little chance of any united power base challenging this view. The union players had the freedom to play rugby as they wished with their social equals and in a manner that need not interfere too much with other facets of their life. For the serious rugby players, the RFU controlled the rewards, which included the prospect of playing for the County, Country and the Lions. Although none of these honours brought any financial recompense, they brought the laurels that were highly valued by many players. The prestige, the honour and ultimately the chance to play in a far distant country for The Lions, was sufficient to ensure that the amateur code was supported, particularly as the alternative, banishment and a perceived inferior version of rugby, was less than appealing.



Other sports in England also remained largely unchanged. The conflicts of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century had been resolved, the ruling elite had established power in most sports and the professionals were either banned or controlled. However, there were significant changes in society and the influence of other cultures began to affect the British way of life. The hegemony of the dominant culture was therefore being renewed, recreated, defended and modified as it faced challenges by different pressures. The concept of amateurism gradually changed over this period, despite the resistance of the RFU. The central tenet of not being paid to play remained virtually unchallenged, but the broader issues that had formed an integral part of amateurism were under pressure. It is important to examine how the hegemony changed over this period, as the RFU tried to resist forces for change from within the sport in Britain and from external and international sources.

### Hegemony I

The First World War and the period immediately after, were important in the establishment of rugby and the amateur concept at the heart of British culture. It was the example set by rugby union and rugby union players that helped to popularise the sport amongst a fiercely patriotic and grateful middle class. These men best exemplified the national fervour in their wish to serve their country as soon as possible in the conflict. Edgar Mobbs, who was a stalwart of The Barbarians, raised his own company of 250 men, despite being rejected as too old for a commission. The Keswick XV enlisted *en masse* and a resolution was passed by the Blackheath club which stated that:

It is the duty of every able-bodied man of enlistable age to offer personal war service to his King and Country...every Rugby footballer of the present day comes within the scope of Lord Kitchener's appeal.<sup>2</sup>

The patriotism of rugby was further demonstrated when all fixtures were cancelled within nine days of the outbreak of war. By the end of the War, seventy nine rugby internationals had been killed and some clubs were decimated. The Headingley club, for example, lost forty seven out of the one hundred and ninety members who had enlisted. The image of soccer suffered in comparison because the Football Association and the Football League were rather slow in cancelling their fixtures, which continued to the end of the 1915 season. This was an ideal opportunity for those who had looked down on the more proletarian sport to demonstrate their disdain. There was something of a public outcry, at least in terms of letters to *The Times*, and a general suspicion was raised as to the willingness of soccer players to fight. This was heightened when a Footballers' Battalion was formed in 1916 and it was claimed by its Colonel that only 122 out of 1,800 professionals had joined. The FA tried to limit the damage by claiming that half of the eligible footballers had already joined up and that the rest were married, but the harm was already done.<sup>3</sup>

It is possible that this reaction to the issue was one restricted to the middle and upper classes, as there is evidence that the working man was untroubled by the continuation of his leisure time activity. When Sheffield United won the FA Cup in 1915, they were branded a 'disgrace' by the local council and refused a civic reception, however a crowd of 70,000 (many of them in khaki) watched the Final. Despite the fact that the railway station in Sheffield was closed and guarded by 40 policemen, a crowd of over 1,500 welcomed them home.<sup>4</sup> This is also an example of a bourgeois attitude to sport, as it was illogical and unfair to compare the disposition of the players from these sports. Although both groups were among the fittest and strongest of the population, their approach to sport was very different.



For the amateur players, their sport was a hobby and therefore an acceptable sacrifice during the war period. For the full-time professional players, sport was their means of earning a living and there was no more reason to close down the sport than there was to close down any other non-essential industry, some of which, for example theatres, continued throughout the war. It could be further argued that as a popular form of entertainment, soccer could have provided a valuable boost to morale throughout this austere period. The Northern Union was also forced to close down for the duration, but partly for pragmatic reasons as crowds had dwindled to such an extent that to continue playing was uneconomical.

Despite these initial hostilities, the reputation of soccer was relatively strong at the end of the war. There was praise from *The Times* for its contribution to victory as the game of the common fighting man. However, the expulsion of Leeds City for illegal payments to players during the conflict, frustrated moves to promote the more democratic sport of soccer in the grammar schools. Although professional soccer continued to draw large crowds, it failed to become the sport favoured by the social elite. Rugby union, moreover, benefited from its inspirational role during the war and dozens of private and grammar schools switched codes.

Post-war industrial conditions favoured the development of rugby. Inflation and the requirement of the government to raise revenue, meant that the tax-exemption threshold was no longer an adequate indication of class and by 1919/1920 there were 7.25 million people paying tax at 30%. There was a great demand for civil servants and managers of services and industry and the proportion of salary earners rose from 12% in 1911 to 22% in 1921. This resulted in an overall expansion of the middle class and a further blurring of class



distinction at the top.<sup>5</sup> Those who were now able to consider themselves as middle class, attempted to behave in a way that they perceived was appropriate to their new station in life and this included embracing middle class manners, modes of behaviour and pastimes such as tennis and rugby union. It is no surprise, therefore, that the post war years of the 1920's saw a great revival in the fortunes of rugby union.

In the years that followed the Great War, there was a general fear of Bolshevism amongst the elite of British society. It is likely that this fear was also present amongst the governing bodies of sport and increased their determination to keep out the lower classes. It has been suggested that the proletarian nature of soccer with its "pools and woodbine" image had put off the upper and middle classes and consequently many public schools turned to the more 'pure' sport of rugby union. The reputation of the public schools had been enhanced by the demonstration of leadership from its former pupils, which further promoted the value of sport, and rugby in particular, as a builder of manliness. The Hadow Report in 1926 recommended that all pupils should go to secondary schools at the age of eleven and enabled a number of the existing grammar schools to expand their numbers and hence socialise more boys into rugby. This attitude and a desire to revive the public school ethos of 'Muscular Christianity', led to many soccer playing grammar schools taking up the more middle class rugby union game. This not only ensured that there would be a plentiful supply of future rugby players, it also continued the homogeneity of the sport and its amateur ethos. An indication of the prevalence of rugby union amongst the elite schools was shown by an American study in 1926, which found that fifty of the leading public schools played rugby union compared to twenty-five that played soccer (the game of most

local authority secondary schools).<sup>6</sup> It is highly likely that most grammar schools chose rugby union both as a means of setting themselves apart from the local authority schools and to further imitate the Public School model. The resultant enhancement of rugby union's virtues during the 1920s, meant that the RFU expanded by two hundred and thirty-one clubs, compared to a previous expansion of only eighty two clubs since the turn of the century.

By this time, top level soccer was played almost exclusively by professionals. The top amateur soccer club, Corinthians, were unable to compete on equal terms with their professional counterparts after the Great War. Their rugby equivalent, the Barbarians Club however, continued to develop their fixture list and played top class teams throughout their history. In 1921, the connection between rugby and heroism was further emphasised with an annual match between the East Midlands and the Barbarians in memory of Edgar Mobbs who was killed leading his own men at Paschendale. The Barbarians continued to attract the best players from all over Britain and as a recognition of the high standards the club had set, they were invited to provide the final opponents to the Australian team in 1948. This was the first of what was to become a traditional final match for any international touring team. In keeping with the concept of not taking the game too seriously, a further tradition was established where at least one player in the Barbarian team would be a non-international.

The Rugby Union remained vigilant as ever with regards to any player suspected of either receiving money from the game, or who played rugby with professionals (a ruling that was only relaxed during the period 1939-45 for players serving in the forces). While the game remained dominated by upper and upper-middle class gentlemen, there were few that flouted the amateur regulations and



defections to rugby league were relatively rare. The dominance of the rugby union code was defended strongly by those in positions of power and influence and they quickly poured scorn on anyone who suggested that Rugby League was a worthwhile sport. The Editorial of "Rugby Football" in October 1923, contained a reply from the editor to those who had asked that news of the Northern League matches should be included:

...it surely does not need a vast amount of intelligence to realise that the spirit of RU football is absolutely against professionalism...we quite realise...that many Northern League players are very good fellows and fine sportsman. It is not with the individuals that we are concerned but with the system...it is a dead certainty that the publication of Northern League matters would be utterly distasteful to the true 'Rugger' man. There is no doubt that the Northern League enthusiasts would like to read about their code in Rugby Football, and that full use would be made of any opportunity to spread the doctrines of the Northern League amongst Rugby Unionists. And what would the result be? Surely confusion would be worst confounded!<sup>7</sup>

This is an indication of how the term 'Rugby Football' was taken to mean the union code for most people. Despite the apparent hostility from the editor, there remained those who did question the social exclusion of rugby. Later in the same journal there is a letter to the editor that echoes the same sentiments with regards to publishing information on the Northern League, yet it does express concern as to the plight of the working man within rugby:

...a man in an office who has a 'Chief' keen on the game can get off a certain amount of work in order to take part in Saturday matches or non-Saturday matches. His salary drawn monthly does not suffer. But the factory worker who asks for time off for similar purposes has his pay stopped for time he misses. ...It will be a better England when the working man plays 'Rugger' instead of watching 'Soccer'. The late R.W. Poulton-Palmer was I believe in favour of payment for broken time. Cannot this question be re-opened and regulated in such a way as to place the manual worker on the same footing as the office worker? It is only justice and will help keep the Northern Union wolf further from the door.<sup>8</sup>



### Internal Pressures

The popularity of rugby as a spectator sport continued to grow. Matches at Twickenham became social occasions to rank with Lords, Ascot, Wimbledon and Henley. Crowds at Twickenham grew from 18,000 in 1910 to 49,000 in 1924, to 73,000 at the 1936 match against the All Blacks. The England players on these occasions were the privileged few who could afford to devote the necessary time to develop the levels of fitness required to compete at the highest level. There was no organised training for most players; instead it was their own responsibility to find the time to prepare for the matches. The influential W.W. Wakefield acknowledged that players needed to get fit and apart from smoking and drinking cocktails in moderation, he also suggested that players should do a little running during the week to improve their wind. This would normally be done alone under streetlights, and more than one hour per week was to be avoided as it would induce staleness.<sup>9</sup> The emphasis was on individual responsibility and there was no suggestion of coaching or tactics:

We didn't do much training. We used to train at the club on a Thursday. About two of the team would turn up that's all. Then you'd run up and down the field twice and think you'd trained. I was never asked to do anything more than that. There was no coaching at all, absolutely none. We couldn't be bothered with it anyway. We were too busy doing other things, rugby wasn't important enough; it was just a pastime.

*Tommy Wallis*

The IRB laws made the point quite clearly that it was considered professional for an international team to spend too long together before a match. The 1925 law stated that it was contrary to amateur spirit for teams to assemble at a centre prior to a match for training. The patronising demeanour of the selection letter to one player also reveals that even at this early stage the players were still expected to put in some extra work:

Dear Gibbs,

You have been selected to play for England v France at Paris on Saturday 2nd April 1927. Please let me know by return if you are able or unable to play. Also let me know if there is any doubt of your being a doubtful starter...I am asked by the Selection Committee to impress upon the Team and Reserves the necessity of making a very special effort to get themselves thoroughly fit.<sup>10</sup>

For many years it was Oxbridge students who were the cornerstone of the England teams. There was natural progression from playing rugby in private schools to playing at universities, where the annual Varsity match was placed on a par with a full international and becoming a 'Blue' was still as important as gaining a degree. Those who were able to extend their University days as long as possible had sufficient time available to keep fit and were also able to continue to play rugby at a high level. J.E. Greenwood, for example, was sure his international career was over in 1913 as he had gone down from Cambridge and needed to devote his time to his career. He was able to return to Cambridge the following year after borrowing money from his brother and played again in the Varsity match and for England. He returned for a fifth year after World War I and although he was anxious to retire from all rugby at the age of 29 in order to concentrate on his business career, he was persuaded that he should captain his country on the proviso that he did not have to play for his place.<sup>11</sup>

By the late 1920s, it was recognised that international rugby required a dedication that was beyond the scope of most dabblers. Rugby was becoming a more serious pastime and there was a danger that a professional attitude would be developed, which was still an anathema to those in control of the sport. In 1935, the RFU declared that at least three years should elapse between major tours in the interests of players on whom increasing demands were made every season. Even so, many players were forced to recognise that top class rugby cost them time and money. Cliff Morgan was forced to retire from rugby in 1957 at the age of 27:



I couldn't go on playing big time rugby. If I'd continued to play in 1958 I'd have been in the running for another bigger tour at the end of the season: the Lions to New Zealand. I couldn't contemplate another six months off work. We had no money and I knew I had to get a serious job and settle down to work.<sup>12</sup>

With the establishment of rugby union as an unpaid pastime having become entrenched, the RFU had to ensure that the other aspects of amateurism were equally continued. By ensuring that all positions relating to the broader amateur concept were defended, the RFU effectively stifled any potential discord at an early stage and so maintained the status quo. There were, however, occasional lapses in their resolve, such as the decision to allow numbering of players in an International match for the first time at Twickenham in 1927. The opposition from traditionalists was not so much that the BBC provided live coverage of an international match for the first time but, rather the fact that the English and Welsh shirts bore numbers for the first time in order to aid identification. The Scottish RFU regarded this departure from tradition as an unwelcome encroachment of commercialism and their President Jock Aikman-Smith dismissed any suggestion that the experiment should be continued with the remark that "Our men are no' cattle."<sup>13</sup>

A perusal of the minutes of RFU Committee meetings shows that, during the decades between the two World Wars, the controllers of rugby were able to maintain consistently the broader concept of the amateur code. During this period only one incidence of outright professionalism was reported when two players were accused in 1934, one of whom, T.W. Brown, was banned for life. He requested reinstatement on a regular basis until 1946, by which time he may have decided he was too old to play again anyway and eventually accepted his fate. There were, however, other issues that needed to be addressed such as the more circumvent routes to being paid, such as journalism and travel expenses. In 1927,



the writing of articles and reporting on matches by players was considered to be “contrary to the spirit of Rugby Football”.<sup>14</sup> This was adapted five years later to allow those who were engaged solely in the profession of journalism, to write such articles. It was an issue that was continually re-visited as media interest in rugby grew and players came to be seen as valuable assets because of their heightened profile. Similarly, expenses for travelling were perceived as possible means of rewarding players and various pronouncements were made such as limiting expenses to the level of third class rail fare. The difficulty for the RFU was not in deciding the regulations, but applying them and they were reliant on information on any transgressions in order to act on them. If everyone firmly believed in these laws then they would be adhered to, otherwise the RFU would need to develop a culture of informants similar to that of the Nazis or KGB.

It was recognised that the teaching profession was a vital agent in the maintenance of the dominant culture and there was a need to ensure that boys were being taught in the correct way. The RFU was unable to prevent rugby league players from teaching in schools (although it did try) but constantly appealed to schools for their assistance in promoting rugby in the correct way. What this meant appears to have changed in a relatively short period of time. In 1934, there was a request made to headmasters to curb “over-specialisation” in the teaching of rugby, a clear reference to the fun side of the sport. By 1949, however, there was recognition that quality players needed to be produced by the schools and the first coaching course for schoolmasters was organised.

Increasingly over this period, the RFU was forced to address the commercial realities of administering a modern sport. These costs began in a very small way, in 1926 there was much deliberation at committee level before it was

agreed to purchase a water sprinkler for £6 (£185). That same year the committee discussed concerns about the accommodation for spectators, which was causing much anxiety. Over the next 70 years the accommodation caused greater problems as the maintenance of the stadium and the constant need for minor and major improvements became a continual drain on rugby's finances. Aside from health and safety regulations, the increasing sophistication of the spectators meant that modernisation work was essential, as was accommodation for the committee, the press, radio and eventually television. Car parking was a problem that hardly needed to be addressed when the stadium was first built, but it became the main mode of transport for spectators as the century progressed and ever increasing tracts of land had to be rented or purchased for car parking. The bureaucracy involved in running a growing organisation increased the need for more and more committees including Finance, The Four Home Unions Committee, The Five Nations Committee and The Referees Committee. Those who served on these committees expected the players to play for nothing, whilst they expected Committee privilege such as free drinks, dinners and receptions and first class overseas travel. To service the organisation and the stadium, more and more staff were employed with housing required for some employees. Other costs were incurred due to the burgeoning amount of rugby being played. The senior representative sides, the Colts and Schools sides, all needed support with their tours to and from other countries. Originally, there was a desire to foster the game overseas without taking on a commitment to play those countries, but as these nations improved their playing standards, more internationals were played. In the 1950s a coaching system was established, as well as publications to help spread the word of rugby. The RFU was also heavily committed to maintaining and



developing the club system in England and they continued to disperse money in the form of loans and donations to clubs, even when this meant it had to borrow the money to do so. On the positive side, demand for tickets remained constantly high. This in itself caused a dilemma for the RFU as their amateur principles suggested that ticket prices should be low to avoid any accusations of becoming a commercial sport. In 1946, England were the only Home Nation who did not increase the cost of admission which was set at 10/- (£10.20, about a quarter of modern admission charges) for the stand and 2/6 (£2.05) for the ground and they pledged not to do so for a number of years. By 1953, such was the spectator demand that matches had to become all-ticket and in 1956 the cost of maintaining Twickenham was given as the reason why ticket prices rose by 20-30%. Tax was another burden faced by sports in general, and although the threat from Entertainment Tax was removed in 1953, the RFU realised that it had to establish itself as a Charitable Trust if it was to continue the role it believed was its duty.<sup>15</sup> It is suggested by Dunning and Sheard that despite their best efforts over the years, the governing bodies had become caught up in the professionalisation of rugby. Because they had to administer an international game and keep it amateur, the board had to develop more formal structures and because of the need for bureaucracy, they had to rely on the money brought in by spectators. Although Twickenham was referred to as a 'cabbage patch' (because the land it stood on had previously been part of allotments) it developed over the years into a fine stadium. The very act of purchasing the land and building a stadium implied a desire to welcome spectators and also signalled a need to bring money into the sport, in order to develop the ground. By insidious means, the defenders of the amateur faith had been forced to embrace financial realities.<sup>16</sup>



### **External Pressures**

Perversely, the RFU appeared to be determined not to allow rugby to become commercialised as the old habits surrounding the amateur ethos prevailed. Money was clearly seen as something that would be a corrupting force in the sport and any links with the squalid side of sport was to be avoided. Advertising was an anathema to the RFU and so dismissive were they about the need to generate income through rugby, that they abolished advertisements in International programmes in 1929. Requests to allow dog racing on club grounds were put to the RFU on numerous occasions. Each time they were firmly refused, as was playing floodlit matches when gate money was taken. The leasing of grounds for any purpose was viewed as unacceptable, particularly when professional sport was the leasee; it appeared that such contact with professional sport was considered likely to contaminate rugby. When some clubs applied to play matches on Sunday this was resolutely turned down. Sunday was still viewed by most governing bodies as being inappropriate for sport, despite it being the most suitable day for working class participation and it has only been in recent years that the Sabbath has been used for sport. In 1926, the RFU declared that such a move would "... put a great strain on the conscience of those who prefer to put first things first."<sup>17</sup>

The relationship with the professional version of rugby was significant throughout this period. Rugby League remained the enemy and the only time that there was any form of truce was during World War II, when professionals were allowed to play rugby union in the armed forces until the end of National Service. Once peace had been established in Europe, the RFU declared war on professionals once more and three players who had played rugby league in 1945 were refused re-instatement as amateurs. It appears that the Rugby League was

anxious to develop some form of rapport with the RFU, but an offer to play a match for charity in 1949 was instantly rejected. So inflexible was the RFU in dealing with any club or individual even contemplating links with rugby league that, over the years their laws became ever more stringent. Although a professional from any other sport was deemed an amateur in rugby, anyone over the age of 18 who played amateur rugby league was deemed ineligible as was any adult connected in any way with a rugby league club. Further, it was declared that it was the *intent* of players that was important and that from 1957 if the actions of a player implied intent to seek financial or material reward, he would be declared a professional. Such actions as these led to accusations from the Rugby League that such laws were an infringement on individual liberty. This was an issue that would develop further as the RFU became out of step with the dominant culture.

The issue of television became of ever-greater significance to rugby. In the 1930s it was a minor matter, but by the end of the 1950s not only were the sums of money involved far greater, but also the very existence of cameras in the grounds was being debated. Until the arrival of ITV in 1955, the BBC was the only provider of television and was, therefore, in a position to dictate terms. This was reflected in the size of the fees for covering sporting occasions, as the BBC claimed that it had a right to cover events similar to that of the press and so they offered facility fees which were a payment to compensate for the inconvenience of the loss of seating space:

It has never been the Corporation's policy to pay for the right to broadcast... It is our firm belief, however, that the promoter should receive a fair payment for the facilities which are offered in the form of space, and as a reimbursement for any inconvenience or expense incurred on our behalf.<sup>18</sup>

In the period after the Second World War this was a standard fee of 25 guineas. The sporting organisations, however, had become worried about the effect



of television on live attendances at matches and as the low level of fees being paid did not compensate for this, there was justifiable cause for concern over the long term viability of the relationship. There was also the example of the different relationship between sports and TV in America, where commercial channels were providing large sums of money to sport, particularly with regards to boxing. As a result, the leading associations joined together to form the Association for the Protection of Copyright in Sport in 1944. The All England Lawn Tennis Association, the MCC, the RFU, the Football League, the National Hunt Committee, the British Boxing Board of Control and the Jockey Club joined together to gain a copyright for sports promoters similar to that held by authors. This led to a restriction in the amount of sports that were shown on television and it was left to Parliament to resolve the issue. The Post-Master General subsequently established the Sports Television Advisory Committee where the representatives of leading sports organisations agreed to negotiate with the BBC. In 1949, the RFU was receiving £45 per match for a total of six matches (this would be worth £800 today; still giving the BBC excellent value for money). However, with the competition looming due to the imminent arrival of commercial television, the BBC was forced to offer a more realistic figure for coverage.<sup>19</sup> Although the BBC had suggested that there was no great public demand for rugby, they still wished to televise four internationals, the Oxford vs. Cambridge match and the inter-service final as part of their duty as a public service. The RFU Committee found that it was facing opposition from two sides and in 1952 it decided that the advantages accruing to rugby from live television were greatly outweighed by the dangers to the game as a whole, consequently transmission outside of normal playing time was the preferred option. The clubs, however,



disagreed with this and the RFU eventually decided to allow live transmission of a selection of matches. In a manner that was to be replayed over four decades later, the RFU failed to discuss this with the other home unions and accepted that their contract with the BBC only covered matches played at Twickenham. By 1959, the fee for each match was £3,000 (£36,400) a figure that helped the RFU considerably in its efforts to balance the budget, but it was an income that they came to rely on more and more.

### **International Pressure**

As the principal defender of the amateur ethos, the RFU had significant difficulties in retaining control over the other rugby playing countries. To some extent it is clear that they were prepared to turn a blind eye to events in order to retain control. This can be seen by the experience of Watcyn Thomas who played for Swansea and Llanelli in the 1920s and 1930s and commented upon the different approach of English clubs when he joined Waterloo in 1929:

Waterloo was truly an amateur club, for players bought their own kit and jersey and paid their own travelling expenses to the ground...No one limped into the bar after the game because of the florin stuffed into the toe of his shoe.<sup>20</sup>

By stating that this practice did not exist at Waterloo, Thomas acknowledges that it did take place at other clubs, presumably the ones he was most familiar with in Wales. The game was so deeply embedded in society, that given the difficulty in finding culprits, it would appear that the Welsh Union was prepared to ignore the problem rather than precipitate a schism of its own. With the exception of the Arthur Gould affair in 1897, the RFU generally left Wales to administer rugby on its own terms. Only those foolish enough to be open about their finances were punished, such as the Cardiff full back Alban Davies who was expelled for being a

professional in 1938 when he claimed £3 for loss of work when he assisted Major Stanley's team at Oxford.<sup>21</sup>

In France they did not have the same rabid fear of professionalism, however they did need the four Home Nations for the majority of their international fixtures and had been taking part in the Five Nations Championship since 1910. The RFU became concerned that the French clubs were at best over-zealous in their approach to rugby and determined to win at all costs. It was this unnecessary roughness of the players and the violence of the fans that led to a boycott by the home nations of the rugby competition of the 1924 Paris Olympics (there was a crowd riot when the USA beat France in the final). In 1931 when twelve French clubs attempted to break away from the French Federation and set up leagues, the Home Unions acted swiftly and France was excluded from the Championship until 1946. The RFU clearly felt its authority was being challenged and they were forced to act over such a blatant transgression of the amateur ethos. Because of the power of the RFU within the IRB, they were able to use this sanction, which undoubtedly served as a warning to other nations:

Until the FFR comes to our way of carrying on, we cannot condone what is going on in France without playing traitor to all that we in the four Home Unions have been taught and believe about the Game.<sup>22</sup>

When a rival organisation, the International Rugby Federation, was established with other European unions, the RFU and IRB successfully isolated those countries involved. France was only re-admitted in 1939, when political pressure was applied on the RFU to show European solidarity with France over the threat from Germany. As a condition of resuming relations, all professionals had to be banned for life and a reminder was issued about how rugby should be played: "The real foundation of the game as played in our countries is the friendly match



between clubs.”<sup>23</sup> When the problem of leagues in France was an issue again in the 1950s, the RFU was not so severe in dealing with the problem. In the first instance in 1950, a confidential letter was sent to the FFR expressing concern, followed by a request that the FFR conduct its own investigation. In 1954, assurances were received that everything was in order which apparently satisfied the RFU, perhaps an indication that the RFU no longer had full authority over the way other countries interpreted amateurism. It may also have been an indication that as long as the breaches were not blatant, then the RFU had found that it was pragmatic to turn a blind eye rather than try to exert power that it may no longer possess. Outright professionalism however, was still to be fought against as Italy discovered in 1958, when member countries of the IRB were warned not to allow contact with Italy because their 23 professional clubs were unacceptable.

The RFU and British dominated International Board were able to influence the way rugby developed in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and were committed to the broad interpretations of the amateur concept. The IRB was concerned about the developments that led to players becoming specialists in their positions, as this indicated too much of a desire to win rather than just to participate. In 1921, they changed the law that allowed a player to call for a fair catch but then give the ball to a specialist kicker to punt the ball. In 1932, a plea was issued to players, referees and officials to abolish specialisation amongst forwards, as this was considered contrary to the spirit of the game.<sup>24</sup> To ensure that the IRB retained its authority over professionalism, it was agreed in 1937 that suspension for professionalism by one union was to be recognised by all other unions. However, as the century progressed, despite the apparent unity of the members of the IRB, there were conflicts between nations relating to how the sport should be played. It was the



countries from the Southern Hemisphere that caused the greater dilemmas for the rugby establishment. Not only did the immense distances cause problems in communication and administration, but South Africa, Australia and New Zealand were also the dominant playing nations and, therefore, able to exert a growing influence on the sport.

It was the success of the touring sides who visited the British Isles that exerted pressure on the Home nations to find a way to compete with the Wallabies, the All Blacks and The Springboks. To continue to lose to nations who were still colonies of the British Empire, was an unappealing prospect and if this required a more serious approach at the highest level, then changes would have to be made. Playing was still to be on a strictly unpaid basis but once again, the definition of amateurism was being diluted. If hegemony is developed by the elite and permeates downwards, then in rugby terms it was the Southern Hemisphere nations who were the elite and therefore, it was the way they approached rugby that was likely to have influenced future generations. On a number of occasions, the RFU discovered that rugby in the Southern Hemisphere was developing along subtly different lines.

In 1923, it was discovered that a number of Rhodes scholars from Queensland had played rugby league in Australia. When this was reported to the RFU, the students were suspended pending an inquiry. A committee interviewed them and found that although the allegation was true, there were mitigating circumstances. Rugby union football had completely died out in Queensland and the universities and schools had little choice but to play against rugby league clubs to ensure a meaningful fixture list. As none of the players had ever received money for playing or had ever knowingly played with or against professionals, they were re-instated as amateur players. To do otherwise would have forced all players from

the State to become rugby league players. This is an example of the close scrutiny of the RFU and how seriously they regarded any breaches of amateur laws (a commission of three RFU members plus eight Oxford RFC committee members dealt with the issue). It also indicates the precarious relationship between the northern and southern hemispheres at a time when communication was a real problem. The power that the RFU was able to exert over these three nations was of a very uncertain nature. Not only did the distances involved make effective administration almost impossible, but an overly authoritarian attitude may have led to a breakaway, either in terms of forming their own union or by joining rugby league in outright professionalism. The RFU had to tread a very careful line in order to retain its authority. In 1932, New Zealand requested dispensation to allow replacements for injured players and to leave the pitch at half time. Although this was initially refused, when they learnt that this had been common practice for over forty years, the RFU was left in something of a dilemma. Their solution was to agree to turn a blind eye to the practice and this was outlined in a letter from the President A.D. Stoop to the New Zealand Union:

... In the first instance we are strongly opposed to the practice of 'replacement'. It is quite contrary to our traditions and any alterations in our attitude towards it would be attended by grave risks to the game as played over here...We regard accidents as 'all in the game' and so to speak 'a rub of the green'...If after further consideration your Union decided that it is impossible for it to keep in line with us and it is obliged to adhere in the practice of replacement of injured players because that practice has been so long established in your country, the most the RFU Committee can say is, that of itself it will not take any notice unless compelled by circumstances to do so...There can of course be no question of 'replacements' in any match in which a team from the British Isles takes part.<sup>25</sup>

The growing power of the Southern Hemisphere was acknowledged in 1948 when England gave up two seats on the International Board so that Australia, South Africa and New Zealand could have one seat each. The balance of power was still with the home nations who had eight of the eleven seats. Even when in



1958 they received full status with two seats each, the home nations still had overall control. However, there can be little doubt that as the dominant playing nations New Zealand, South Africa and Australia, wielded a great deal of influence on the way the sport was developing and if the IRB was to remain a world body, then it had to retain the membership of these countries. Even so, there was some concern as to the means that were being utilised to develop their rugby playing strength. In 1950, the RFU President went out with The British Lions to discuss issues surrounding professionalism with his New Zealand counterparts. As no report came back from this meeting, it is to be assumed that again it was felt that discretion should be exercised. This may have seemed a very attractive option since it was unlikely that such practices could influence British players. After all New Zealand was a long boat journey away and there was only media interest in New Zealand rugby every five or six years.

On the whole, the major teams from the Southern Hemisphere were rather more divorced from the controversy about amateurism. They did not have the same conventions of being a gentleman, and played the game in a more serious way, with pride in their level of performance together with a win ethic that was more pronounced when playing against their colonial 'masters'. They were also prepared to treat their players fairly and enable them to combine work and rugby in a way that would have been considered professional in Britain. Because they approached the sport in what might be termed a 'professional manner', they developed strategies and skills, which improved their playing standards. As relative dabblers, the British teams were being left behind as South Africa and New Zealand continued to be the dominant sides in the 1920s and 30s, reportedly playing a more scientific game than the British. The Southern Hemisphere teams continued to set



trends that the home nations could only attempt to follow. The New Zealand team in the 1920s experimented with the scrummage and used a 2-3-2 formation with the spare man acting as a 'rover'. Other teams found this hard to cope with as it allowed for a concentrated push to come through the two front players. In the 1930s, it was a South African scrum half that invented the dive pass and a South African outside half that made the boring but effective punt upfield popular. In the 1950s, the New Zealand team took this tactic further and developed a style of play that simply required forward domination. This came to be known as 'ten-man rugby'. Unimpeded as they were with the class based amateur ethos, the Springboks, All Blacks and Wallabies used rugby to define their cultures. They showed pride in their performance, a determination to win and a willingness to work at their skills, fitness and strategies to a level far beyond that of the staid British sides. It was perhaps the different way that their cultures defined amateurism and professionalism that allowed them to develop their game. The Southern Hemisphere nations demonstrated that this hegemony was emergent. Their attitude to sport in general and rugby in particular, was the one that was to become universally accepted by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, while the attitude demonstrated by the home nations was clearly residual by that time. As early as the 1930s, Australia was given permission to change the law relating to kicking into touch on the full, this gave them a thirty year head start on the British teams in playing a more open, running game. To the Southern Hemisphere nations, professionalism was about far more than being paid and in this respect, they had been professional in the way they approached rugby for most of the century. This was emphasised by the New Zealand Barbarians in 1996. The party found the

dispute about money that was disrupting British rugby to be something alien to them:

The New Zealand Culture is all about the game itself and we try to enhance that whenever and wherever we play...it's not having to win, it's having to play well and that's something inbred in us.<sup>26</sup>

## Hegemony II

Just as commercialism was forced on the RFU, so there was a change in attitude towards sport that made a significant difference to the amateur hegemony that had been evident in the years just after the Great War. In a study of British sport, Kircher in *Fair Play*, published in 1928, considered the centrality of fair play in society:

Sport and play in England are not merely exercise for the mind and body, but aim at making the individual a useful member of a unified whole and such a state is only possible if 'fair play' is observed.<sup>27</sup>

Fair play was the cornerstone of the hegemony of sport, with how the game was played being considered more important than the result. This was only truly possible with the absence of league and cup competitions and the continued absence of professionals. This left rugby as the only major sport where the notion of fair play could be developed. Kircher himself identified it as the most arduous test of fair play containing, "An apparent savage and reckless fight for the ball with the strictest self control."<sup>28</sup>

Despite the fact that sportsmanship was the crux of British sport during this period, there is a suggestion that somehow by the end of the World War II it was far less important. The notion of fair play, for so long the essence of the British model of sport, had been gradually eroded. It had been replaced by a desire for victory within the rules with the referee/umpire as the sole arbiter of those rules. At the height of cricket's 'bodyline' controversy in 1933, M.A. Noble, a former



Australian captain, argued that the English bowlers were well within their rights to test the 'leg theory' stating, "I think the umpire should be the sole judge of fair and unfair play."<sup>29</sup> The reliance on authority to determine the legality of an action took the moral responsibility away from the players. This allowed participants to 'bend' the rules as far as possible and, to some extent, penalties were acceptable provided they ultimately led to victory. Hence we now have the notion of the *professional foul*, which is a foul committed not with malice but with cool detachment. The intent is not to injure but to limit damage to one's own cause. Further evidence of this gradual change in attitude can also be seen in rugby. One of the most famous and influential players of his era was A.D. Stoop who played fifteen times for England before the Great War. He became President of the RFU in 1932-3 and was still a committee member in 1950. He was, in terms of his background, typical of the RFU establishment. Educated at Rugby School and Oxford, he played for Harlequins and was a barrister by profession. Stoop was a staunch supporter of the amateur principles of sport and he may have perceived that times were changing even within the RFU Committee. He certainly felt sufficiently concerned to table a proposal in 1950, reminding the RFU of their responsibilities, "...it is the duty of the Committee of the RFU to protect the interests of the clubs and the freedom of the individual players."<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, no vote was permitted on this proposal and it was noted that this was a resolution that would always be honoured.

By what mechanism had this change taken place? With amateurism and fair play so strongly supported by the elite of society, there ought to have been sufficient safeguards to maintain the status quo. In the early part of the 20th Century, there was recognition in Britain, that other countries had adopted our sports and had modified them to suit their own needs and purposes. What made



this more unpalatable, was the success that these countries achieved. It was felt that the international bodies, particularly FIFA and the IOC did not have the same rigorous attitude towards amateurism as the British Governing Bodies. In the 1920s, consideration was given to Great Britain's withdrawal from the Olympic movement because of its interpretation of amateurism. Similarly, the British authorities disagreed with FIFA in 1928 over their definition of amateurism; specifically, they disagreed with FIFA's ruling that players could receive an appearance fee as compensation for missing work. Consequently, none of the Home Nations appeared in the World Cup Finals until 1950.

It became apparent that not only were the international organisations powerful enough to sustain these decisions, but they were no longer reliant on British patronage and so the dominance of British teams and performers was at an end. In all the major sports such as tennis, cricket, athletics, golf and rugby it was the foreign players and teams that were the most successful. Only in soccer was there an illusion that British teams were still dominant and this may have been partly due to its relative isolation from the world stage caused by the withdrawal from FIFA. It was an illusion that was shattered in 1953, when the Hungarian team defeated England 6-3 at Wembley and 7-1 in Budapest the following year. The press reflected the nation's growing dissatisfaction with the concept of losing gracefully and demanded success on the playing fields. Under the headline 'High Time We Started To Win' in 1950, the Daily Mail not only asked the questions but also gave some answers:

Just why did England fail to win a place in the final series of the World Soccer Cup? Why were the West Indies able to beat us at Lord's? And why so early in the Wimbledon tournament as last Thursday did we learn that Britain had departed from the stage of the men's singles?<sup>31</sup>

Suggestions of how to become more successful included increasing the competitive nature of British sport and changing the attitudes of the players, who were accused of being too gentlemanly (see Appendix 5). This was a demeanour that had been noticeable in some performers for a number of years, but it was an approach that had not met with widespread approval. There was an attitude developing amongst some players which challenged the dominant culture of means rather than end in sport. This can be observed in the behaviour of three British sportsmen in the 1930s, who found sporting success but social exclusion. In cricket, the dominance of the Australians led to the England captain Douglas Jardine, an amateur and a gentleman, developing a tactic of bowling at the bodies of the Australian batsman and the professional working class bowler Harold Larwood assisted him in this. The strategy of *leg theory* was successful in so far as England regained the Ashes, however, the scandal caused by what was considered by many to be unsporting behaviour, resulted in a diplomatic row between the two countries and almost resulted in Australia leaving the Commonwealth. Jardine and Larwood were never selected for England again and Larwood eventually emigrated to Australia where his win ethic was more aligned with their culture. The attitude of one of Britain's greatest tennis players was also out of step with the dominant culture. Professionalism had not been a problem for tennis until the 20th century and the LTA continued to fiercely defend the amateur ethos. But there had not been a British winner of the Wimbledon men's singles title since 1911. When Fred Perry won the title in 1933, there were those who felt his success was due to a professional attitude. As the son of a Labour MP, the tennis establishment, despite his success at Wimbledon, did not accept his working class origins. His success



over the next two years further embarrassed those who would rather see a gentleman lose gracefully:

I wasn't popular there. Too brash, wrong background. When I beat the German Baron von Cramm 6-1, 6-1, 6-0 in the 1936 final I heard a Wimbledon official go up to him and say "I'm so sorry. Perry, you know, isn't a gentleman."<sup>32</sup>

That year Perry left England to become a professional player and lived the rest of his life in America. These three players exhibited attitudes that were more in keeping with the way sport was played in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century than the first half, therefore it is clear that this was the emergent hegemony. Although the RFU was in firm control of the players and clubs and was able to maintain its amateur principles, there were certainly suggestions that slowly and almost imperceptibly these were no longer universally held beliefs. It is difficult to determine exactly when this metamorphosis took place, but certainly by 1945 the situation had deteriorated sufficiently in George Orwell's perception for him to highlight the link between sport and war:

2 Serious sport has nothing to do with fair play. It is bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard of all the rules and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence: in other words it is war minus the shooting.<sup>33</sup>

This process was further accelerated with the growing influence of American culture. One of the dominant trends of the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century has been the Americanisation of Europe and because of the closeness of our languages, it has been British culture that has arguably been affected the most.<sup>34</sup> From the 1930s, the Hollywood film industry followed the early influences of popular fiction and vividly portrayed American culture via the cinema screen. The presence of large numbers of American personnel in England from 1941, exposed people to their speech patterns, mannerisms and attitudes. Britain became exposed to a different and increasingly dominant culture. One of the cornerstones of the



American way of life is the pursuit of achievement and success in contrast to the traditional British approach of effortless attainment.<sup>35</sup> The American approach to sport reflects their culture and is perhaps best summed up by the ‘Lombardi ethic’: *winning isn’t everything, it’s the only thing*. The British norm is represented by the phrase first spoken by the Bishop of Pennsylvania and later taken up by Baron Pierre de Coubertin. This anglophile and supporter of British sport as it was played in the late 19th Century proposed a watchword for the Olympic games: *it is not the winning but the taking part*. As the influence of American-made programmes on television took effect, its influence on British culture became more significant.

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<sup>1</sup> C. Morgan & G. Nicholson, (1996), Beyond The Fields of Play, Hodder & Stoughton, London, p136

<sup>2</sup> Cited in Birley, (1995), Playing The Game: Sport and British Society 1910-45, Manchester University Press, Manchester p59

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> P.M. Young, (1981), Football in Sheffield, Dark Peak, Sheffield

<sup>5</sup> D. Birley, *op. cit.*

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Rugby Football: A Weekly Record of the Game Vol 1 No. 5, October 6 1923, p105

<sup>8</sup> C.W. Sykes, “The Workingman Player” in Rugby Football: A Weekly Record of the Game Vol 1 No. 5 October 6 1923, p112

<sup>9</sup> W.W. Wakefield & H. Marshall, (1927), Rugger & How to Play It

<sup>10</sup> Letter to J.C. Gibbs from S.F.Cooper Secretary RFU 20<sup>th</sup> March 1927

<sup>11</sup> J.E. Greenwood, (1977), A Cap For Boots: An Autobiography, Hutchinson Benham, London

<sup>12</sup> C. Morgan & G. Nicholson, *op. cit.*

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## **CHAPTER 4**

### **LOSING POWER**



### **Introduction: The Americanisation of Sport**

The period since 1960 has seen a continuation of the declining influence of British culture and a corresponding rise in the influence of American culture. As the 'American' way of playing sport is so fundamentally different to the 'British' way, it is essential to explore these differences in detail as they serve to explain some of the changes that occurred in sport during this period.

The Cold War led to greater links between the military and the American-based multinationals (for example Ford, IBM) which tied Europe and the USA more closely economically. There has been some resistance to this cultural invasion, with elements in France particularly anxious that their language should not lose its 'frenchness'. Concerns were voiced that terms such as le drugstore, le hamburger and le disco were becoming common parlance. Just as America has influenced the way people dress (jeans, T-shirts, sweatshirts and pants, trainers, windcheaters and baseball caps), so British sport has taken on many American characteristics.

American sports themselves have become a popular aspect of British culture. Baseball, basketball, ice hockey and American Football have mushroomed as both spectator and participation sports, largely due to the influence of television. In 1983 there were only two American Football teams in Britain, by 1986 there were one hundred and fifty.<sup>1</sup> Although this figure has dramatically declined, it serves to show the impact that television has on cultural habits. The razzmatazz element of American sport has also been recently adopted, with teams putting on pre-match entertainment, using cheerleaders and running out onto the pitch or court to loud rock music. The general bourgeoisification of football spectatorship may be a further example of American influence. A male dominated, working

class activity has been transformed into a middle class family oriented (at least by intention) activity complete with all-seater stadiums, mascots, restaurants and hypermarkets.

There are significant differences between the way America and Britain have traditionally approached and organised their sports. A comparison of the two models demonstrates how the British model represents the norm of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries and it is the American model that is the more contemporary:

**COMPARISON OF BRITISH AND AMERICAN MODELS**

**BRITISH MODEL OF SPORT**

**AMERICAN MODEL OF SPORT:**

PARTICIPATION

ENTERTAINMENT

PLAYER CENTRED RULES

SPECTATOR CENTRED RULES

TAKE PART

WIN ETHIC

GENERALISM

SPECIALISM

AMATEUR

PROFESSIONAL

SPORTSMANSHIP

VICTORY ESSENTIAL

MEANS NOT END

ENDS NOT MEANS

NEUTRAL RESULT POSSIBLE

NEEDS A WINNER

PYRAMID SYSTEM: ALLOWS

DRAFT SYSTEM: FOCUS ON ELITE

EVERYONE TO PLAY



There is a thriving amateur structure within the culture of sport in the USA and in many ways it is more rigorously administered than in Britain. The college system may have strictly defined amateur rules that prevent payment for playing, but at the top level they are in many ways as 'professional' as the major leagues. Other colleges, particularly the 'Ivy League' have adopted the broader amateur ethos and more closely follow the British model.

It could be argued that even though many sports in England had become professional, they were being run as if they were still amateur. This is a criticism that has been levelled at many sports over the last few years; particularly those run by large unwieldy committees such as the FA and the RFU. These sports were not organised or commercial enough to fully support a large number of professionals and a comparison with the organisation of sport in the USA may illustrate this point. By the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, a cartel had developed in baseball with local monopolies, player contracts and minor and major leagues. Even so called amateur sport that was played in the colleges was exploiting its commercial potential. Harvard built a stadium to seat 50,000 spectators in 1909, the Yale Bowl that was built in 1914 was even larger with a capacity of 61,000. The major sports in the USA became highly commercialised and supported a small number of teams organised in a system that allowed all teams in the league to share in the profits. This has led to a highly lucrative business where only a few teams share the rewards. In football, the NFL has only thirty-one teams for the American public to watch and support (population 273 million), in England, however, the football league is more democratic but far less profitable with 92 teams (population 49 million). This has enabled the top sports performers in the USA to earn far more money than their British counterparts, a trend that continues today. In 1928, Dixie

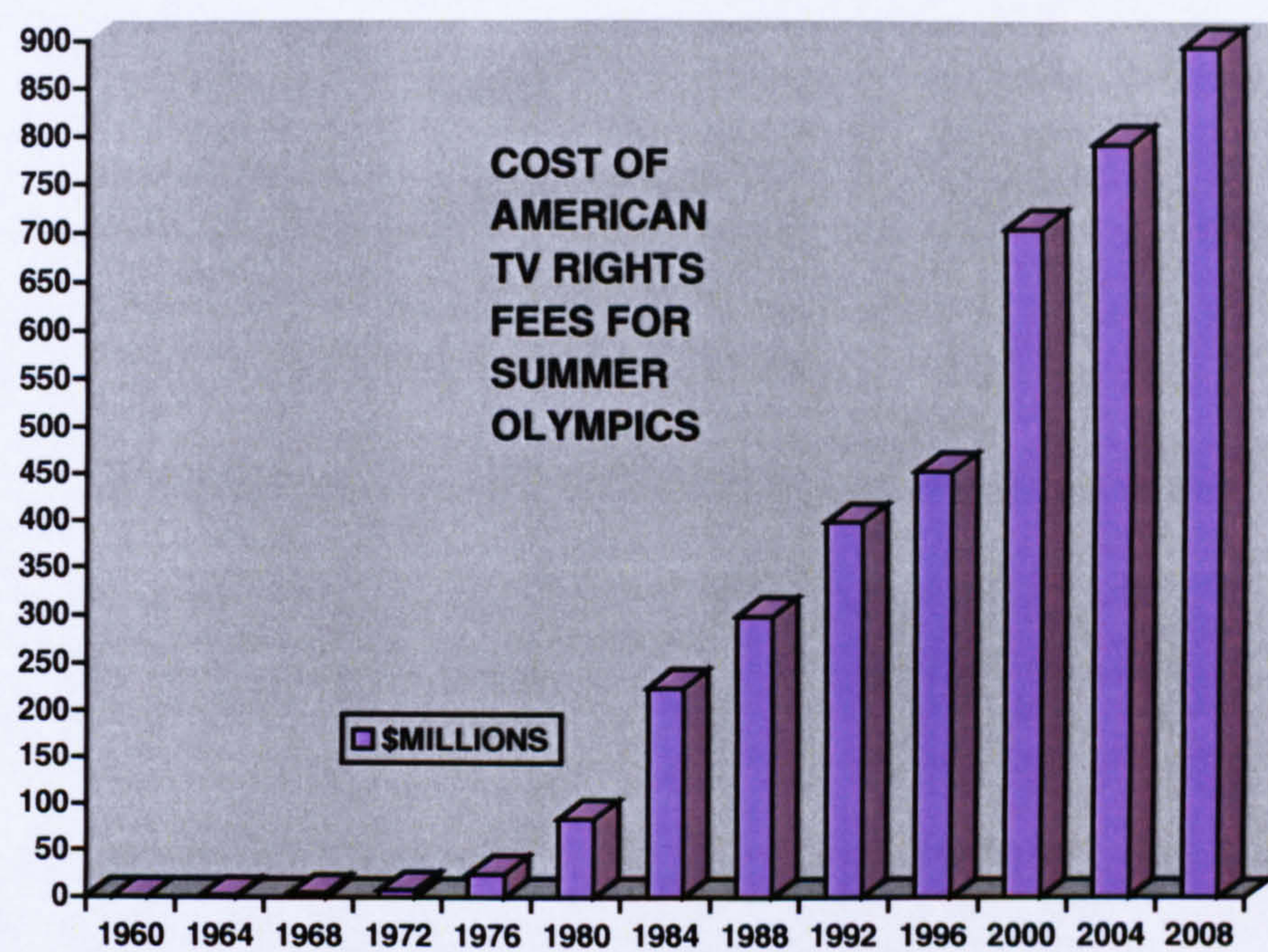


Deans scored a record breaking 60 goals for Everton and was paid £416 (£14,000), the same year Babe Ruth scored the same number of home runs for the New York Yankees and was paid £16,460 (£550,000). The top players in 2000 are better rewarded but a significant differential remains, Roy Keane received £2.76 million from Manchester United while Kevin Brown received £9.69 million from the LA Dodgers (plus the use of a private jet).<sup>2</sup> The amateur system in the USA was largely used to support the professional elite and was used to enable the top athletes to benefit from an education before moving into the commercial sector. This system also enabled USA teams and individuals to compete in the Olympics as amateurs and demonstrate the benefits of the capitalist system over communism. In Great Britain, the tainted image of the professional sportsman had continued into the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

In the USA, the professional nature of many of their sports and the need to attract spectators and viewers, led to a culture of sports as entertainment, particularly in the age of television. Commercial channels vied with each other for the greatest share of the advertising cake and looked to sport to provide them with the means to attract the most viewers. The more popular the entertainment, the higher the potential revenue from advertising time. The following graph shows how the Olympic movement, ostensibly an amateur celebration, has become a media dominated event.<sup>3</sup> The figures reflect not only the drawing power of televised sport, but also the increasing reliance of sport on this form of income. Some sports are eminently suitable for television, particularly commercial television which relies on revenue generated in the breaks between programmes. In America during the 1960s, the major sports became more receptive to the



changes that were needed in order to make them more commercially attractive for live TV channels.



In 1992, the average American household watched 178 hours of sport on television (over 3 hours per week) with advertisers spending more than \$3.7 billion a year sponsoring sporting events.<sup>4</sup> To be viable to sponsors, sports need to accommodate commercial breaks. Football, ice hockey and basketball are played over quarters and have ‘time outs’; baseball has nine innings, allowing sixteen changeovers per match, plus time outs. Tennis has one-minute breaks every three games, which could also be used for commercial intermissions, although undoubtedly television would prefer a longer interval. British sports are less amenable to commercial television, although cricket has the end of each over and tea and lunch intervals that can be used by advertisers. Soccer is less tractable and when soccer was trying to establish itself as a sport in America during the 1970s, one of the problems was the lack of opportunity for commercial breaks. At first they tried to simply cut away from the match for two minutes, unfortunately in soccer a goal can come out



of the blue, so they could cut back to the match only to find a goal had been scored. This did not go down well with the viewers. In another attempt, the referee's time out (which in effect was an advertisers time out) was not popular with the players who were not used to these events, or with the live spectators who were bemused at the sight of twenty-two footballers idling about waiting for the game to re-start. The USA proposed, and received the support of the FIFA President for, twenty minute quarters for the World Cup in 1994.

The notion of 'Time Out' is alien to most British based sports, but since the onset of the FA Premier League in England, the half-time interval has been increased to fifteen minutes, allowing time for analysis and two or three commercial breaks. Also, the fact that soccer is the most popular spectator sport in the world allows it to continue in its present form and to remain commercially attractive to sponsors. The sport of rugby does not lend itself readily to commercial television. It is difficult to insert advertisements into periods when the ball is not in play, as these can be very unpredictable. So although the ball is out of play for up to 55 out of the 80 minutes of each match, the only opportunity for commercial breaks is in the half-time interval. It is interesting to note that since the onset of professionalism, this has been increased from five minutes to ten minutes. In conjunction with soccer, it could be suggested that rugby is a blue chip sport, it is not as popular as soccer but has a more affluent following. This makes rugby union an attractive sport to prestigious companies. Rugby is also a valuable commodity to commercial channels, partly because it helps them sell more 'packages' and persuades more people to contract to satellite or cable television.

Participants are also treated differently according to the dominant sports culture in their society. American players are undoubtedly paid in excess of their



British counterparts, yet they are allowed considerably less freedom of action. In American sports, it is the coach or coaches who are responsible for decision making and the use of the numerous time-outs to organise and influence their teams. In American football and baseball, coaches use complicated signals to key personnel to ensure that they know what is required. In British sport, coaches or managers have less opportunity to influence the match once it has started. British sport gives more autonomy to the players to make the decisions. Occasionally this is with the aid of the coach's representative on the pitch, the captain, who in cricket has almost total responsibility for tactics once the match has started. This may be explained by the more entrenched commercial nature of American sport. The players have been traditionally treated as employees and many, therefore, have the same influence on overall strategy as would production line workers at Ford. There may be occasions where experienced employees have something to offer, but generally management makes decisions. The British model of sport has less of a power differential between performers and managers and therefore, it is the American model that illustrates the Marxist perspective of professional sport. The capitalist owners have purchased labour in the market and the players perform under the supervision of the managers with their product remaining the property of the owner. The players, although not powerless, have less power than the owners of the means of production.<sup>5</sup>

Ironically, just as an American model appears to have become the dominant hegemony, there is a small, but perhaps significant movement that wishes to adhere to some of the traditions of the more pure forms of sport. It represents a desire to resurrect some of the old values in the face of the greed and over-commercialisation of present-day sport. At a time when there is excessive hyping

of competitions (for example any of Prince Naseem's bouts), allegations of match fixing (in cricket and soccer), drug taking, wife beating and ear biting of opponents, it is a sanitised version of the past to which some people are turning. In America there is a growing demand for *Vintage Baseball*, that is baseball played to 19th Century rules. On Long Island alone there are ten teams with over three hundred players, coaches and umpires.<sup>6</sup> This is exemplified in the film *Field of Dreams* when the main character builds a baseball diamond in the middle of a farm and players from the past come out of the surrounding corn to play. The film uses vintage baseball to represent a time when sport was fun and not an industry.

Another irony is the growth in popularity of rugby in the USA in recent years. At the same time as British sport was becoming Americanised, another sport was re-appearing with the traditional values of the British game.

Amateurism is also part of the game's ethic creating a social ambience and a standard of crowd behaviour and attitude which are the envy of many other major sports...the international growth of amateur rugby football is largely due to the fact that many people, particularly in North America, wish to express themselves outside the narrow view of professionalism.'<sup>7</sup>

It has been suggested that this represents a countercultural alternative. There were a number of players and spectators who enjoyed the content of American Football, but wished to distance themselves from its ideologies and so turned instead to a close relation of the sport and its traditional image.<sup>8</sup> The emphasis on elitism in the more commercial sports means that there is little opportunity to continue playing once a player fails to make 'the cut'. When players of American Football are unable to step up to the next grade (at high school, junior college, university and NFL) their playing days are over. It may be, therefore, that they change for pragmatic reasons rather than cultural dissatisfaction.



In the USA, the major sports have been commercial and largely professional since the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. As the influence of the USA was felt more and more at the end of the same century, commercial interests increasingly dominated British sport.

### **The Commercialisation of Sport**

The ability of the privileged elite to exercise their hegemony over sport continued largely unchallenged until the 1960s, when sport was transformed into a more commercial enterprise. Those sports which had remained amateur throughout the 20th Century were, paradoxically, the most vulnerable to outside economic pressures. As the paying spectator declined as a major source of income, all sports had to look to other markets, but the fabric of professional sport remained relatively unaltered. It was the amateur sports that were faced with a real dilemma, for as the administration of their sport grew, greater levels of finance were required and the income generated from traditional sources was simply not sufficient to meet this demand. Due to the amateur ethos of those who exercised control over these sports, there was a reluctance to exploit their commercial potential. As a result it was the amateur sports which failed to come to terms with commercialism and that faced a real crisis as opportunities for participation in other leisure pursuits areas grew. In athletics, attendances at competitions fell dramatically and by 1967 bankruptcy was a real possibility for the AAA. The English national sport, cricket, saw a slump from over two million spectators in 1949 to 750,000 in 1965 and it was clear that it could not survive solely on its gate revenue. Even football was suffering from falling attendances, the peak of 41.2 million in 1949, was down to 28.6 million in 1961.<sup>9</sup>



Faced with a need to compete for a dwindling number of 'live' spectators and alternative sources of revenue, the 1960s saw many sports undergoing significant change. There was a need to restructure many sports in order that they became more appealing to wider audiences and to prevent potential performers from drifting away. Essentially, the governing bodies had to bring their organisations more in line with the ways of a modern, commercially oriented society, rather than remain entrenched in the patterns that they had adhered to for almost 100 years. Most sports recognised that the amateur/professional divide was preventing many players from competing on equal terms at international level, and one by one the major sports abandoned the principle of discrimination against professional players and allowed market forces to determine levels of remuneration. Football abolished the maximum wage in 1961 and Cricket abolished the distinction between the Gentlemen (amateurs) and Players (professionals) in 1962. Tennis was concerned that its best players were turning professional and therefore leaving their control, and so abandoned its 'amateur only' rules in 1967. Only the major sports of athletics and rugby were defying the trend and remaining nominally amateur, creating in the process an era that became known for its 'shamateurism'. Rumours and innuendoes relating to brown paper bags stuffed with cash, and boots containing fivers were rife. Evidence of such payments in rugby will be dealt with later but it was not the only sport to suffer from illegal payments. In athletics, three of the top British middle-distance runners, Chris Brasher, Steve Cram and Derek Ibbotson have all confessed to receiving cash payments when competing as amateurs.<sup>10</sup> For rugby and athletics, remaining amateur while other sports allowed their players to be paid, was certain to cause difficulties and the RFU and AAA added to this pressure when they

became reliant on the income from television and sponsorship to administer their sports. Athletics accepted it was impossible to remain amateur in a commercial world and changed its rules relating to amateurism in 1981, but the RFU continued to insist that the amateur way was the only way acceptable for rugby.

Although rugby did not become openly professional until 1995, the sport started to undergo gradual change from 1960 and began to make progress towards becoming a fully commercial and professional sport. One of the difficulties for rugby in remaining amateur lay in its determination to expand. The purpose of the International Rugby Board is to:

Promote, foster, develop, extend and govern the Game of Rugby Union Football.<sup>11</sup>

An ambition such as this, required that rugby competed for players with other sports and that finances were available for promoting and organising the sport at all levels. The major source of income for rugby was the international programme, which had essentially remained the same as at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, an annual Five Nations Championship with occasional tours from the Southern Hemisphere. These matches were still extremely popular and Twickenham could have been sold out several times over. Such was the demand for tickets, that by 1960 the presence of ticket touts around Twickenham was raised as a problem for the first time in an RFU committee meeting. This income alone was not sufficient to maintain the infrastructure that had developed and there was a reluctance by the committee men at Twickenham (many of whom were successful businessmen in their own right) to turn rugby into a commercial enterprise. In 1962, the RFU announced a net profit of only £6,235 (£70,000) over the previous ten years, a figure that was at odds with the increasing amount of money that was needed for administration, re-building work and loans to clubs.<sup>12</sup> More straightforward



methods of increasing revenue, such as raising the cost of admission and the sale of programmes were reluctantly agreed to and in 1963, prices were increased by 50%. However, anything which threatened the amateur nature of rugby such as sponsorship, 'rugby pools' and an increase in television coverage, was initially strongly resisted and an offer from a sporting goods manufacturer to sponsor a goal kicking competition in 1964 was "not entertained" by the RFU.<sup>13</sup>

If the paying spectators were to remain the major source of income for rugby, then the sport must be attractive for spectators and the sport needed to provide stadia to rival those of soccer, tennis and cricket. There was some discussion in the press in 1963 that prices at Twickenham had gone up to £1 10s (£16.50) from £1 (£11). Vivian Jenkins was one rugby writer who called for more consideration to be given to the spectator; he was not complaining so much at the cost of admission and he accepted that the RFU needed more money. His point was, that without the paying spectator the RFU would not have money to develop the sport and yet no attention seemed to be paid to the entertainment value of rugby. He dismissed the phrase "the game is for the player" as simply a timeworn cliché and cited examples of how the laws were stifling running open rugby. He called on the administrators to make rugby more enjoyable for players and spectators:

...he who has paid for Twickenham and many other grounds beside – is not an enemy of the game. Rather he is an ally of the players and officials in a common cause...the man on the bank and in the stand wants to see the player enjoy himself (sic) as much as anybody, but he wants to enjoy himself as well. The two things are not incompatible.<sup>14</sup>

Over the next few years the RFU did indeed attempt to develop a more entertaining version of rugby.



### **A Changing Game**

Laws were slowly introduced to make the sport more attractive but without detracting from the essential nature of rugby. These changes were gradual so there remained a sense of continuity with the past. However, to contemplate such a concept was a major change of policy for the RFU, and the Southern Hemisphere representatives proposed most of the law changes. For example, the 'Australian Dispensation' that restricted kicking directly for touch to within the 25-yard (22 metre) area, became law in 1969. An examination of the way the laws were changed over this period shows how far the RFU were gradually forced into changes from a number of sources and shows the effect these law changes had on the sport. Although there were a number of law changes in the early years of the RFU, essentially the game remained the same during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It was not until 1971, that the value of a try was increased to four points from the three that had been the norm since 1894. It is the scoring of a try that makes rugby exciting and appealing to the spectator, yet the governing bodies had made no attempt for over seventy five years to encourage players to use this method of scoring above any other. In 1960, the RFU were adamant that they would resist major changes to the laws and made it clear that they would not consider any further changes to the laws until 1964. Over the next three decades, the changes to the laws came at an increasing pace, often seemingly taken without consultation with other interested groups within the sport.

Rugby had to become more exciting and entertaining for both players and spectators. A cynical view might be that this was done solely for commercial reasons, however, it could also be argued that rugby was evolving to meet the changing demands of society. There had been changes to the way rugby was played in the middle and late 19th Century which were far more sweeping in

nature. These law changes civilised a game that was by modern standards, a barbaric and dangerous sport, yet they were able to retain the essence of the game. This was a problem that the IRB, which had been responsible for the laws since 1930, had to resolve; to develop a sport that was enjoyable for both the spectators and the players. Rugby had evolved into a running, handling game but some of the excitement and entertainment had been lost as teams, particularly at international level, made winning their priority. The basic tactic of running and passing was no longer a successful method of breaking down a well-organised defence. Matches became dominated by the set piece plays of scrums and lineouts and were won by kicks rather than by tries. It is the uncertainty of the outcome that makes sport compulsive for players and spectators and should it become apparent that the rules of competition (which were designed to set participants arbitrary ascendancy problems) no longer fulfilled their purpose, then they need to be changed. All sports go through this process, as can be seen in baseball where the balance in competition between pitcher and hitter is constantly being adjusted by raising or lowering the pitchers mound or changing the size of the home plate. Another sport that has constantly had to change its rules is motor racing. As soon as one team becomes superior and races become meaningless, the rules are changed to eradicate the source of this superiority.

A further difficulty with the development of rugby as a commercial sport, was the level of legalised violence and the concept that the ability to accept pain was a feature of masculinity. Just as the civilising process of the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century led to the abolition of hacking, in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the sight of players continuing despite obvious pain and injury became unacceptable. Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning explain that as society becomes more civilised there is a shift in



the threshold of embarrassment and revulsion. This would therefore how societal norms change as the hegemony becomes residual. In this way, once popular pastimes such as bear baiting and dog fighting are rejected by society as inappropriate. Two incidents in the 1960s involving England players were instrumental in the decision to allow replacements. In 1964, Mike Davis was playing against New Zealand when he dislocated his shoulder and played on with it hanging limply from his side. Two years later David Perry also played on despite tearing the cartilage in his knee after 15 minutes and never played rugby again.<sup>15</sup> From 1968, replacements were permitted for injured players, first in international matches and later in all matches, which helped to improve the sport as a spectacle. The notion that an injured player should carry on regardless of the pain to demonstrate his commitment to the cause, had no place in modern sport. Nor was it appropriate to suggest that a depleted team should show their true character by overcoming adversity. It is essential that the uncertainty of the outcome be maintained throughout the match if it is to reach the heights of intensity sought by players and spectators. Losing a player can provoke the rest of the team to strive harder and gain a surprising victory, usually however the side with a full complement is more likely to win. Soccer was faced with a similar problem when successive FA Cup finals in the 1950s were ruined as spectacles, because one side was reduced to ten fit men. This led to a gradual relaxing of the rules during the next three decades, with more and more players allowed to be used as substitutes. A superficial evaluation of different sports suggests that the greater the level of professionalism, (that is the greater the reliance on spectators) the more substitution is allowed. This would seem to be a logical progression as there is a need to see a team at its most proficient at all times. If the nature of the sport



dictates that specialised players are required, then they should be brought into play, yet the British model shows a reluctance to encourage this. Although substitutes are permitted in ever-larger numbers in soccer and rugby union, once a player leaves the field he is unable to return (except for 'blood replacements' in rugby). Cricket has been even more reluctant to allow replacements, and so no substitutes are allowed for the batting side and only monitored replacements for fielders. The American model is very different, as specialist batters are allowed to replace pitchers in baseball and players come on and off the arena in ice hockey and basketball. Perhaps the most 'professionalised' sport is American football, where not only do individual players come on and off at any time, but there are four different teams that can take the field when their particular specialism is called for. British sports are still designed for the participant and as the vast majority of players play purely for pleasure, they want to stay on the field as long as possible. American sport is more outcome oriented, and in the case of American football, the sport only exists at an elite level and virtually no recreational version of the game is played. As rugby became more professionalised, so it became necessary to make allowances for the specialist nature of some positions and to permit more replacements. Strictly speaking, tactical substitutions were not allowed in amateur rugby, but as the desire to win and the rewards available grew, it was a temptation some could not resist and a few players feigned injury in order to allow a replacement to take the field. A point later conceded by Vernon Pugh Chairman of the IRB.<sup>16</sup> A further aspect of the sport that was influenced by the civilising process, was the potentially dangerous area of the scrummage. The power generated by the two packs can have a crippling effect on a body that is twisted or pushed into a vulnerable position. Laws have been framed, which it

could be argued are a continuation of the civilising process of the 19th Century lawmakers. Some of the practices that enabled a prop to establish his dominance over his opponent, such as lifting or lowering, have been banned despite the same accusations of emasculating rugby as the prohibiting of hacking had produced in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. There is little doubt that a sport that could result in a young man spending the rest of his life in a wheelchair because his opponent wished to prove his manhood, had no real place in modern society. The punching, gouging, head butting, biting and testicle twisting that went on in the dark recesses of the scrums were and are, virtually impossible for the referee to police. Brian Moore gave an example of such practices in a match against France in 1992:

Gimbert, the tight head from Begles gouged me in the eye....I spoke to Steve Hilditch the referee: " I know you can't see everything but can't you do something about this?".....When Probyn went down for the scrum, he bent his head to protect himself as Moscato duly came in with the head butt.<sup>17</sup>

The level of violence in the form of kicking, stamping and punching that had become an accepted part of the sport was a further threat to the acceptance of rugby as a civilised sport. The early effect of the increasing seriousness of matches resulted in an increase in violence and 'friendly' matches between Cardiff and Neath were stopped for a period due to the high levels of aggression. Gareth Edwards reported that in one such match he was frightened for the first time on the rugby field.<sup>18</sup> For some players the violence was as much a part of the sport as the running and passing:

There were a large number of pretty unsavoury characters around in those days [1970s] who had quite a reputation. It was pretty tough, much more stop-start than now. I have seen two sets of forwards literally with their fists raised to smack each other, then the whistle went to end the game and they just smiled, shook hands and went off. For some of them the fisticuffs were part of the game but afterwards it was have a drink and a chat.

*Barry Corless*



As rugby became more subject to outside scrutiny, through increased television coverage, so this type of behaviour was reduced. The RFU, the officials and at times the judicial system, all played their part in sanitising rugby.

The period 1958 to 1995 saw the law changes that heralded the start of a modern era in rugby. In order to tip the balance slightly in favour of the attacking side the scoring of tries had to be rewarded and the importance of kicking reduced. Perhaps the law changes that signalled a change in the importance of the paying customers came about in 1958, when two laws were amended in a way that allowed greater continuity in the game. The 'knock-on' law was adjusted and allowed players to fumble the ball so long as it did not touch the ground. This meant that players involved in difficult moves and close quarter passing were no longer penalised for the merest nudge forward before gathering the ball. The other law change allowed players who were on their feet, to play the ball with their hands instead of just their feet after a tackle. This allowed the first player to the breakdown to pick up the ball and run with it and so speed up the game. Space also had to be created for the team in possession of the ball, as a law which allows the balance to tilt towards the defending side will inevitably lead to sterile, boring matches. As defences became more organised, the freedom of some players had to be controlled. New offside lines were therefore created in the scrummage and lineout (1965). The scrummage law was changed to prevent the loose forwards and backs creeping up and following the ball in its passage through the scrum, making the back foot of their scrummage the offside line rather than the ball. At lineouts, only those involved in the line and the scrum-half were allowed within ten yards of the throw. These two laws gave the three-quarters far more time and space to

execute their moves and the creation of a 20 yard “no-mans’ land” at line-outs, allowed sides to attack from their possession in a way that was not previously possible.

One of the defining elements of rugby, is the concept of the scrum and the relative importance of this has changed over the years. For some the scrummage is merely a means of re-starting the game, which creates space for the backs by tying eighteen players into a small area, thus leaving most of the pitch for the other twelve. However, it has always been an integral part of the game and for some players, the result of their personal battle in the scrummage can be more important than the result of the match. Mike Burton suggested that the result of his first England Trial was 3-1 to the Possibles, indicating that they took three tight head scrums, and thereby proposed that the actual result of the match was irrelevant.<sup>19</sup> For the knowledgeable spectator, the scrum can be an enthralling aspect of the game, but for the uninitiated it may be a boring passage with eight players from each side pushing against each other and no more exciting than watching a tug-of-war. In order to negate the superior scrummage of the opposition, various ploys were used that had to be dealt with through the laws. In 1977, the All Blacks were so dominated in the scrummages by the British Lions, that they accepted defeat and pulled all but the minimum three players out of the scrums and crowded the rest of their players in midfield. This minimum number was later increased to five and later to eight players. Other ploys have involved wheeling or collapsing the scrum, pushing too early and feeding by the scrum half. These were all tactics that had to be dealt with by the lawmakers in order to re-establish the status quo with the added dilemma that the punishment of a penalty kick brings back the importance of a kicker. Some writers have suggested that the laws relating to



scrums have been changed to try to make them less predictable.<sup>20</sup> In 1958, the tight-head hooker was allowed to strike at the ball on equal terms with the loose-head hooker whilst in 1964, all players had to keep their feet on the ground before the ball came into the tunnel. This rather misses the purpose of the scrum in modern rugby as teams are awarded the scrum either because the opposition have made a mistake or because they were the team who were attacking when play was stopped. The scrum provides an attacking platform *for the team in possession* and so modern laws are designed to ensure that the team putting in to the scrum not only retain possession, but have the opportunity to capitalise on it (as has long been the case in rugby league). In the professional era this has been taken to extremes. There were 2,500 international scrums between 1995 and 2000 and in 98.5% of these, the side putting the ball into the scrum retained possession.<sup>21</sup> An area of play that made continuity of possession a lottery, was the line-out. Abandoned by the Northern Union by 1897, they were part of what made rugby union so attractive to such a wide range of physiques. Because of the diversity of positions, there was room in rugby for all shapes and sizes and the line-out was the place for the tall players whose main task was to jump and get the ball back to the scrum-half. To ensure that this area of play provides fair competition between the jumpers, a variety of laws relating to the length, depth and spacing at the line-outs have been tried. The role of other players has been subject to change and interpretation and over the last few years of the amateur era, the element of fair competition was gradually eroded. As with the scrum, the balance was changed so that the team in possession had a far better chance of retaining the ball and so reducing kicking to touch. The kicker was able to gain territorial advantage for his

team but faced with the likelihood that they would lose possession, new tactics were developed which would keep the ball in the hands.

The game never really flowed much then [1950s]. There was so much kicking that the ball was off the park for a great percentage of the game... In the lineouts we stood next to each other and if you could, you would stand on his toe to strain his groin, dirty play in a way.

*Ken Birrell*

In order to reward running with the ball, the scoring of a try has to be valued higher than scoring with kicks. In 1971, the value of a try was increased from three points (the same value as a penalty kick) to four points and to five points in 1992. Paradoxically, increasing the value of the try far beyond the value of a penalty encourages desperate defenders to concede penalty kicks in dangerous situations in order to prevent tries from being scored. This defeats the very purpose of increasing its value and as it actually encourages the 'professional foul', it creates something of a conundrum for the law makers and so for a number of years the teams with reliable kickers have been most successful. Similarly, before the 1970s, it was the teams with good punters who dominated matches. The law that allowed teams to gain territorial advantage by kicking the ball into touch had been brought into question by the All Blacks of the 1950s, who dominated the game by playing what became known as 'ten-man rugby'. The whole sport was brought into disrepute in 1963 when the Welsh captain, Clive Rowlands, sought to use his teams' superiority in the line-out by constantly kicking the ball into touch. This resulted in a 6-0 victory against Scotland, but the 111 lineouts in the match did not make for great entertainment. In 1969, the law was changed to prevent players from kicking the ball directly into touch unless in a defensive situation, that is from inside their 25 yard area. This had been originally known as the Australian Dispensation, as it was a concession given to the Australian RFU for internal



matches in order to create more excitement and therefore, compete with rugby league. Its success in Australia led to a demand for its inclusion as an international law and it subsequently changed the nature of full-back play, thus encouraging fast direct runners such as J.P.R. Williams and Andy Irvine, who made the sport far more attractive to watch, rather than kickers. Williams believes that it was this change that made him the player he was:

I was able to expand my game as an attacking full back...had the kicking to touch laws not changed as they did in the '60s, I would certainly not have wanted to stay at full back.<sup>22</sup>

Mauls were the successors to the huge unruly scrummages of the very early days of the sport at Rugby School. This was an opportunity for a team to test their strength by holding the ball and pushing the opposition back and it was seen as an integral part of the game and one that set it apart from the other versions of football. The mauls were a problem that the Northern Union had to address as a fledgling professional sport, because with the ball kept hidden from view for minutes at a time, it made for a rather poor entertainment option. In rugby league the answer was to abolish them altogether but they remained part of the union game. For most of the last one hundred years, it was the team in possession when the maul finally stopped moving that was awarded the scrum. Such a law encouraged a slow, protracted grind, utilising strength and power rather than speed and ball handling ability and this was one of a number of laws swept aside in 1992, in an attempt to banish the 'slowcoach' version of rugby. From this point on, when the maul ground to a halt, the team not in possession was awarded the scrum, effectively punishing the side that slowed the game down. This change was not met with universal approval, particularly in England where a number of top

players and coaches resented the change and perceived it as a law contrary to the nature of the game. Geoff Cooke the England manager said:

It puts the responsibility on the ball carrier but gives an incentive to the tackler. Players will be encouraged to go to ground when tackled to form a ruck, which goes against the whole purpose of staying on your feet to play rugby.<sup>23</sup>

It was perceived that the public wished to see continuity and did not want play slowed down following a tackle. The other part of this problem was what to do with the ball on the ground? The answer in rugby league was found in 1907, with the decision to allow the tackled player to get up and play the ball with his foot. It was out of the question for rugby union to be seen to follow this example and over the years, different laws have been implemented to enable the ball to be played as quickly as possible after a tackle. Until the 1980s, a player who was tackled could keep possession of the ball provided it had not touched the ground. This allowed players from either side to dive on top of the tackled player in an attempt to win the ball. Such a practice was not only dangerous, but also led to a huge pile up of bodies from which the ball had no chance of emerging. The law was, therefore, developed to determine that once the tackled player's body from the knee upwards touched the ground, he was deemed to be tackled and therefore had to play the ball immediately. In order to prevent a pile-up of bodies, players joining the ruck had to stay on their feet and if the ball did not emerge, the team in possession at the stoppage was awarded the scrum. This was designed to encourage players to go to ground in the tackle and keep the ball available for others. Although it took players some time to adjust to these new laws, there is little doubt that it contributed greatly to a more dynamic form of rugby for both players and spectators. These law modifications reflected the changes evident in the wider sport culture and within the RFU itself. It was gradually adopting a more



pragmatic approach to the broad concept of professionalism, while still remaining opposed to the payment of players.

Internally, the pressure from the clubs for more meaningful matches led to the development of a variety of national competitions during the 1970s and 1980s which, in turn, increased the demands on the players. At the highest level players began to increasingly seek some form of financial reward, as they were expected to prepare and perform to standards more in tune with fully professional athletes. This was emphasised when British players became aware of the rewards available to foreign players during tours to the Southern Hemisphere, which became more frequent during this period. In New Zealand and Australia, the Unions themselves were under severe pressure and fighting for their survival against alternative football versions. They were anxious to make rugby into a greater spectacle and to remove any barriers that would prevent them from retaining control of the players. Their position as leading playing nations and the democratic structure of the IRB, enabled the Southern Hemisphere powers to exert greater authority in rugby and this left the home unions increasingly isolated. Just as there was financial pressure on the RFU, there was also pressure from society in general, as the amateur concept of no financial reward for playing was increasingly seen as archaic and incongruous. The need to reform was brought about by pressure from sponsorship, television, the Rugby League and the government, as well as competition with other sports.

### **External Pressure**

In the United Kingdom, there is a long established tradition of free television and, more relevant to this study, a tradition of free sport on television. By virtue of having the field to itself for almost fifty years, the BBC set itself up as

the sports channel and from the year it became a public corporation in 1927, the BBC selected the sports it considered to be important to public interest. As the controllers of the BBC came from the upper and middle classes, not surprisingly the sports that were initially selected for radio and later for television, reflected the sports of those classes. In 1927, this included the Grand National, the Boat Race, inter-varsity sport, rugby union, amateur golf, and the Wimbledon Tennis Championships. Over the years it also associated itself with the Derby, Test matches, the FA Cup Final, soccer internationals, rugby internationals, amateur boxing, professional boxing title fights, and soccer league matches. Since the first outside broadcast was made from Wimbledon in 1937, the showing of live sport on British television had been relatively limited. Major international tournaments and the FA Cup Final were shown live as was horse racing and wrestling. Most football tended to be shown as highlights on Saturday evening, or Sunday lunchtime. For rugby union enthusiasts, only the Five Nations tournament was shown live on a Saturday; in recent years there have also been recorded highlights on Sunday teatime for one hour. The two BBC channels were publicly funded and had a very limited budget whilst the one commercial channel had little reason to drastically raise the stakes, particularly as the BBC had an historic association with sport and regulations prevented exclusive coverage.

The 1960s were the period in which television started to play a large part in British culture. In 1950, only 2% of British homes (340,000) had television sets but by 1960, 82% of the population had access to television. One of the major beneficiaries of this development was sport. As communication satellites developed, viewers were able to see sport from around the globe and they were able to watch events as they unfolded. When colour television became affordable,



performers could become more easily distinguished and as the number of channels increased, so did competition. The introduction of BBC2 in 1964 and Channel 4 in 1983, allowed for a greater range of coverage of previously minority sports. For example, the BBC2 programme "Pot Black" increased the profile of snooker in the 1970s and 1980s, whilst Channel 4 was responsible for popularising American football in England. Until recently, BBC2 had been the traditional home of rugby union with "Rugby Special" on Sunday afternoons.

The RFU had been reluctant to allow television to develop a close relationship with rugby. Their fear of television was part of a general consensus that viewed any commercial bodies as detrimental to the amateur concept. There was also a desire from some quarters within the sport to retain the status quo and to allow too much televising of rugby would be seen as a move away from the traditional idea of rugby for the players, rather than the spectators. When it was proposed in the 1960s to televise the end of season festival, the Middlesex 7's, the RFU refused permission. However, the pragmatic side of the argument gradually began to force the issue. The raising of admission prices had increased revenue, but this had been absorbed by increased costs. Although the £4,000 per international being offered by the BBC in 1966 (£40,000 in 2000) was by no means a fortune, this figure would enable the RFU to continue to develop the sport. A decision was reached that allowed the BBC to show edited highlights of club matches the following day and the RFU's total antipathy towards television was terminated and replaced with a motivation to negotiate the best deal available. The increased presence of rugby on television also gave an incentive to sponsors to become more involved in rugby.

As with television, harsh economic realities forced the RFU to gradually relax their opposition to sponsorship. In the early 1960s, any attempts by companies to associate themselves with rugby were strongly resisted. So although the RFU allowed Flowers Ltd to sponsor the production of a film on 'The Laws of the Game' in 1964, they did not approve the proposal by Whitbread in 1968 to promote the game of rugby by supplying 500,000 beer mats with the RFU crest on one side and the Whitbread name on the other. Later that year, it was agreed by the IRB that "Commercial sponsorship is contrary to amateur principles."<sup>24</sup> Even with this announcement, there was an acknowledgement that some form of link with the world of commerce was inevitable. So, although it was agreed that commercial sponsorship could not be tolerated or even considered, Unions were permitted to allow advertising at matches, which enabled hoardings to appear at international matches. As a result, rugby became a popular sport with companies, despite the relatively low viewing figures for Rugby Special and international matches. These companies benefited from rugby union's association with the top socio-economic groups and its image of a masculine yet gentlemanly sport. The popularity of rugby with major companies, as well as the financial circumstances of the sport, created a pressure on the RFU that was difficult to resist. It is the speed with which the RFU was forced into change that illustrates the degree of pressure the Committees were under. In 1969, it was stated that commercial sponsorship could not be tolerated or even considered. Two years later commercial sponsorship was still not acceptable, but the subtly different (to the RFU) concepts of patronage and commercial assistance were acceptable, with the proviso that they must be of benefit to the game. By 1972, it was further agreed by the IRB, that although clubs and individuals could not be sponsored, it was acceptable to allow advertising and



for Unions to accept sponsorship providing it was used to foster the game on a national basis. Later that year, the RFU formed a Financial Assistance Sub-Committee to establish systems for dealing with approaches by banks and commercial organisations which may be willing to give financial assistance to the RFU.<sup>25</sup> The money offered by companies such as Watney Mann and John Player had become too tempting to resist and within the space of three years official policy had undergone a complete reversal. One industry that was quick to seize upon the opportunity offered by this change of attitude was the tobacco industry. The banning in 1965 of cigarette advertising on television, encouraged the cigarette companies to develop an association with various sports in order to gain access to television and to associate their product with fitness and health. This was a factor that helped shape the future of rugby union with the establishment of the John Player Cup in the 1970s. This sponsorship money became vital to the sports industry, growing from less than £1 million in 1965, to around £100 million in 1983.<sup>26</sup> It was vital that rugby remained on television if it was to continue to attract this type of sponsorship. The Rugby League provided a continued threat to the RFU in the television age, particularly as rugby league club matches were attracting similar viewing figures as international union matches.<sup>27</sup>

The rivalry between the two codes that had been established at the end of the previous century was still enduring. Not only was there still an ongoing debate concerning the right to be considered the premier sport in rugby but, it was now a financial battle to attract the consumers in the same way that Coca Cola was battling with Pepsi Cola. Throughout the 100 years that the two codes were in direct conflict, there was a campaign by the RFU to denigrate the Rugby League. They have been supported in these efforts by much of the media who have

portrayed rugby league players as cynical, brutal thugs and union players as free spirited enthusiasts (See Appendix 7). They have endeavoured to show that league was inferior, that it was the 'poor man's version' of the true code. Even the commentators (Eddie Waring and Ray French) were depicted as being the 'eeh bah gum', cloth cap version of the real pedigree as represented by Nigel Starmer Smith, Bill McLaren and Cliff Morgan. The way the RFU systematically attempted to belittle, ridicule and ultimately destroy the game of rugby league, also highlighted the 'winners and losers' in the war. There were draconian measures taken against those who dared to convert to the professional code, not only were they banned from playing, but they were also banned from rugby union clubhouses. The RFU suspicion of any professionalised version of the code even extended to American football for a while. David Alred, later to be employed by the RFU as a kicking coach, was banned 'for life' in 1978 after he joined Minnesota Vikings. Although professionals from other sports such as soccer, cricket, tennis or boxing were permitted to play as amateur rugby players, it appears that any sport that was played with an oval ball was prohibited. This law was later changed when it became clear that a number of American footballers in the USA wanted to take up rugby in their own country. In 1974, David Duckham was invited to take part in the TV programme "Superstars" but was refused permission by the RFU who declared that association with professional sportsmen in any form of competition was prohibited.<sup>28</sup> As recently as 1994, rugby league converts were described in the press as '*miscreants*'<sup>29</sup> and the same writer dismissed the rugby league players at union clubs in 1996 as unskilled and 'too soft' for the real game.<sup>30</sup> Clearly, the rift was so great that it left an inherited bitterness long after those who were directly affected by it had died. Although the



RFU (and the IRB) tried to maintain their firm stance against Rugby League and rugby league players, financial considerations and pressure from the government forced them to relax their stance. In the 1960s, the RFU was still refusing to reinstate former rugby league players in any capacity as players, coaches or administrators:

A request for the reinstatement of John Ireland of the Liverpool club was considered and refused on the ground that he had played rugby league football for the Widnes Rugby League Club.<sup>31</sup>

The only way that ex-professional players could return to rugby union was as teachers, who were permitted to coach their school teams (from 1967). Perhaps not surprisingly, given the threat of rugby league in a number of countries and particularly Australia, the IRB fully supported this stance proclaiming in 1969 that:

In keeping with the principles underlying the rules as to professionalism, persons who are or who have been associated in any capacity with a rugby league club, should be regarded as ineligible to participate in the affairs of rugby union clubs or teams.<sup>32</sup>

In some sections of society, there remained a traditional disregard for the professional form of rugby, however, with the broadening spectrum of society that union players were drawn from, there was not the same widespread dismissal of the sport. The rugby union establishment, never the less, remained vigilant against the threat that rugby league posed. In 1968, when the Durham County Union reported that a league club had advertised in a local paper for union players to take part in secret trials, players were warned as to the consequence of taking part and Coventry RFC were warned against allowing rugby league players to join their Old Players' Association. By the 1960s, there was less antagonism from the rugby

union players towards the rival code and in many cases there was a certain amount of admiration:

We lost Keith Fielding and Mike Orman [to rugby league clubs]. When they went people said “OK, fine, this is a personal decision by them.” That was it, no rancour. We made it absolutely clear that any rugby league guy, regardless of what the Rugby Union directive was, would be welcome in this clubhouse and that was a personal matter for us as a club and the guys that made up the club. It didn’t change them for us.

*John White*

I was brought up in the Northwest where there is a lot of rugby league. Rugby union is a minority sport around here. I used to go and watch a few ‘league games and I admired the players. At Fylde we didn’t have a problem with rugby league, players who came into the clubhouse and had a few beers.

*Bill Beaumont*

In my career, when I was up in Lancashire a lot of my best mates were rugby league players, it was very highly regarded. Outside of Yorkshire and Lancashire I would think it was regarded with total contempt by the majority of rugby union people. If you lived in the north and grew up in the north and mixed with rugby league players then you realised that theirs was just a different form of the game you were playing.

*Brian Ashton*

There was also pressure developing from groups as far ranging as the Labour Party, the Sports Council and the Methodist Association of Youth Clubs, for a relaxation of the laws against former league players. To begin with, the RFU was totally dismissive of any attempts to alter its stance. The Director of the Sports Council, Sir Walter Winterbottom, requested a meeting with the RFU in 1968 to review the rules which debarred those players over 19 years of age who had played amateur rugby league and a reply was sent stating that, “Any discussion as suggested would be abortive.”<sup>33</sup> From the early 1970s, questions were being asked in Parliament as to whether clubs and the RFU should receive government funding, when their laws concerning professionalism were so unfair and discriminatory. It was something of a shock to the RFU when it realised that this was not an empty threat, and that the Sports Council was refusing to consider



grants to clubs (for ground improvements) unless they signed a declaration that they would not refuse applications from former amateur rugby league players:

There was a small hard-core that said “No – they had taken the shilling and that’s it, they shouldn’t be allowed in.”...I think that we looked for some money at some stage from the Sports Council to do some development work, but in order to qualify for this funding, your club had to be ‘Open’. Nobody could be excluded from membership and I think that caused a little bit of a problem because it really meant we had to accept rugby league people in as well.

*Bernard White*

As this would leave the burden of financing improvements on an already fiscally stretched RFU, there was little option but to change the stance towards *amateur* rugby league players. It is clear that this caused some rancour within the RFU and their feelings were made clear when in 1974 the RFU made an official donation of £5 to the retirement fund of Dr Roger Bannister, the President of the Sports Council.<sup>34</sup> The stance against professional players remained to the end of the amateur era and an indication of the success of the mobilisation of bias against rugby league can be seen by the way the BBC dropped the sport from its schedules. Despite the fact that each Saturday, rugby league matches were regularly drawing a larger television audience than the Five Nations Internationals, rugby league was dropped from the schedule, while rugby union retained its privileged position.<sup>35</sup>

It was not only television and the wider leisure opportunities that took their toll, as a spectacle rugby union also suffered in comparison with other sports and football was a particular threat. The full-time professionals in soccer had the time to hone their skills and develop their athleticism, and as they became more organised and coaching became more scientific, rugby players were left behind. Soccer was a game where the ball was in play for longer and more visible to the spectator, matches were won by scoring goals in open attacking situations by

players who had practised their skills and rehearsed their tactical play. Rugby, by comparison, had players who had relatively low levels of fitness, who relied more on natural ability and who had little opportunity to practice their interactive skills.

We used to arrive on a Thursday and train on the second team pitch at Harlequins, a mud bath, train for two hours, do a few moves, scrums and lineouts. On Friday we'd drive our cars to the Hilton ready for the dinner after the match, play a bit of golf, go to a show and that was it. The preparation for playing for England was actually less than the club.

*Barry Corless*

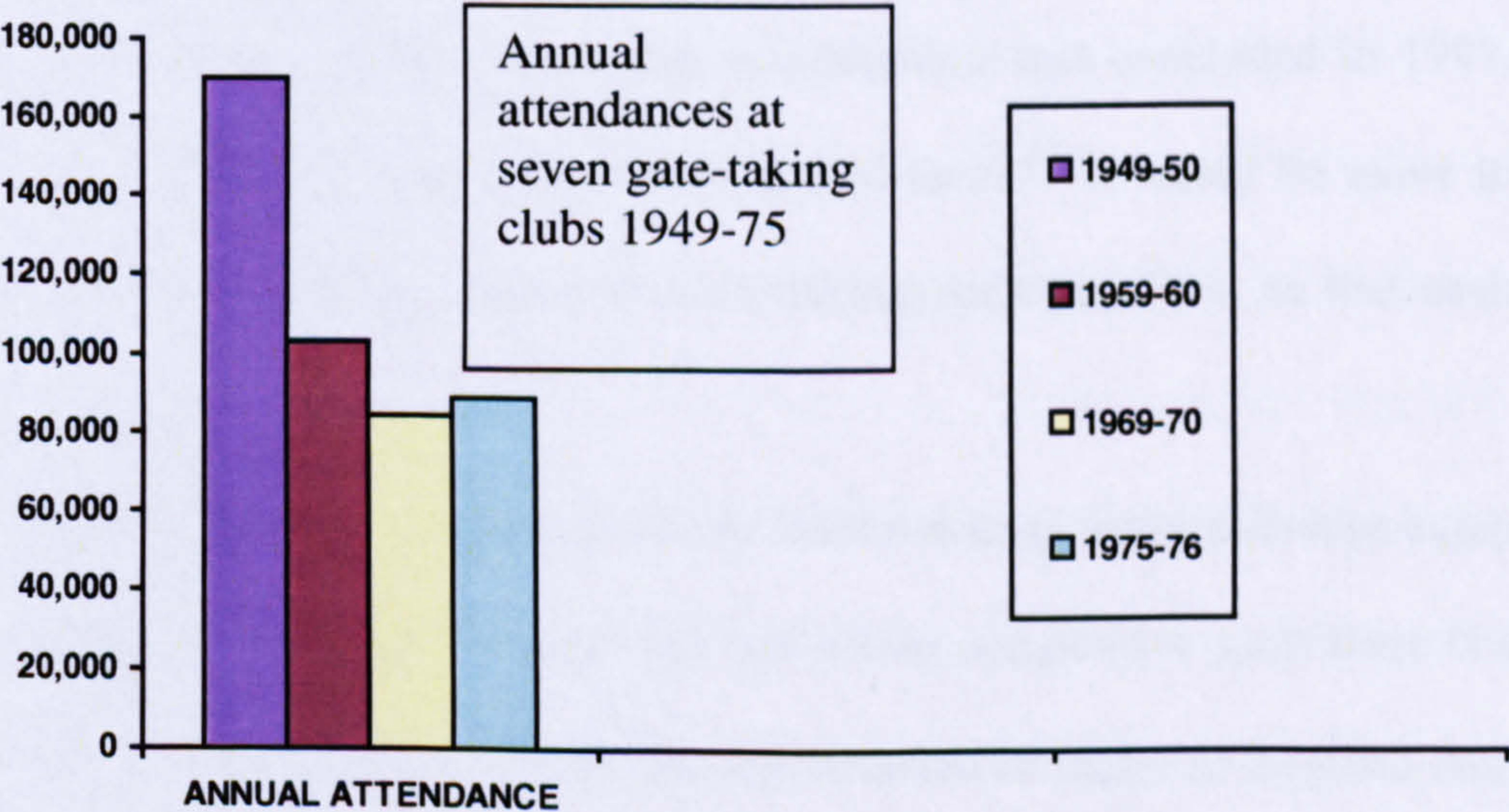
Scoring was often far less dynamic than soccer with teams relying on the accuracy of their kickers to win matches. There was a need to make the game of rugby more attractive, especially as England's capture of the World Cup in 1966, had led to a resurgence in the popularity of soccer.<sup>36</sup> There were a number of high points for English soccer in this period; the success of the national side in 1966 was one of a number of international achievements, which saw Tottenham Hotspur, West Ham, Leeds United and Manchester United winning trophies in Europe. There was also the excitement generated by the FA Cup and the season-long challenge of the Football League, which led to possible championships, promotion and relegation which all gave an edge to soccer matches that rugby simply did not have. A number of clubs, players and spectators began to question the relevance of aspects of the amateur dogma in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

### **Internal Pressure**

In the 1960s, rugby was experiencing severe difficulties and internal pressures for change came from a number of sources. The elite clubs were demanding more meaningful fixtures in the form of cups and leagues. This decade also saw a decline in attendances at grounds and in the pool of players entering the sport, and the influence of television and other leisure opportunities took their toll.



The best-supported club was Gloucester with an average attendance of 5,000, Leicester, Bristol and Harlequins were close behind with 4,000 and Bath and Coventry 2,000.<sup>37</sup> Although these clubs were not strictly speaking paying their players, they still had bills to pay and playing any sport at national competition level costs money. Players were paid travel expenses for playing and training and the cost of coach or train journeys and accommodation for away matches had to be met. The outlay associated with providing playing and training facilities for the players stretched the financial resources of the clubs and the clubs needed more spectators in order to survive. Dunning and Sheard reviewed the annual attendance figures at seven gate-taking clubs over four decades and found that in line with soccer, there was a significant decline as shown in the following graph.



They suggested that these figures indicated that clubs would be under financial pressure and would, therefore, press for changes to be made to make the laws more spectator-friendly and for more lucrative fixtures.<sup>38</sup> There is also a possibility that these figures may have been ‘cooked’ by the clubs involved and that there was no real decline in attendances at club matches. The reason this may have been implemented was to provide money for players in the form of ‘expenses’, which,



at some clubs, could be very generous. Mike Burton pointed out that one player he knew received expenses to get to the ground, but to justify the expenses he received, he would have had to have flown via Hong Kong.<sup>39</sup> Given the way the RFU came down so heavily on any club suspected of making illegal payments, clubs would go to great lengths to cover up any such activity. Payments could come through three possible sources: a generous benefactor or through hidden accounts from bar or gate receipts. In the early 1990s, the Inland Revenue through its Solihull based Special Compliance Unit, began investigating rumours that amateur rugby players were not declaring all their income. As part of this investigation, they took aerial photographs of matches at Moseley and counted the crowd. They found there was a discrepancy between their figures and those provided by the club. After a three year investigation that concluded in 1997, Moseley were required to pay £100,000 in unpaid taxes.<sup>40</sup> It would be naive to think that Moseley were the only club undertaking such practices, or that such practices were new.

It can be argued that many individuals involved in sporting activities enjoy the competitive aspect of participation and that within competitive sport there is a desire to find out who is the best. The existing structure of rugby in England only allowed for this on a restricted level through the Five Nations Championship and the County Championship. Although the latter competition had been designed to serve as a stepping stone between club and international rugby, it had, by the 1970s, lost its appeal to most clubs outside the north of England.<sup>41</sup> For the majority of the players this left only the friendly fixtures. These had been a matter of pride for the clubs and supporters but had become virtually meaningless for those players who were not steeped in local tradition. There were those amongst the



Senior Clubs who wished to see change and to see a significant form of competition that would add an edge to the matches and enable them to find out which was the best team in the country. Such a competition could potentially attract larger crowds, as had long been the case with soccer.<sup>42</sup> There was insufficient challenge to the elite clubs in their existing fixtures and the longevity of these fixtures had made them part of a ritual. The lack of tangible rewards, cups and medals, was incompatible in a society where sporting success was measured not by the number of matches won in a season but by the trophies that had been secured. The matches were not truly competitive and left a large gap between club and county games, which consequently kept the standard of English rugby low, compared to Southern Hemisphere nations. The step-up from friendly club rugby to international matches was proving to be too much for many players and this is reflected in the number of players with very short international careers, particularly the 'one-cap wonders' such as W. Anderson (1973), M.P. Bulpitt (1970) or R.N. Creed (1971). The modern international player required a physical and mental toughness that could only be acquired through consistent exposure to highly competitive and meaningful matches. In addition, the Gate-Taking clubs needed a 'draw' to compete with the higher profile and more competitive fixtures enjoyed by soccer and rugby league clubs. By 1973, there were forty such clubs in England who were dependent on this income to maintain their position amongst the elite.<sup>43</sup> There was also a degree of unrest amongst the clubs below the elite level who had little realistic opportunity to achieve first class status. This was increasingly unsatisfactory in a democratic society and was unacceptable to the group of clubs immediately below the elite who, through the use of the one club one vote system for meetings, had the means to make their views felt within the

RFU. This aspiring group of clubs had vigour and organisation fuelled by ambition and needed a means of achieving their ambitions. The pressures for change became overwhelming and in many ways it was necessary for the RFU to accede to changes in order to retain their authority to govern the sport. The clubs had reached the stage where many of them were prepared to ignore the RFU and almost dared them to take action, particularly regarding the issue of leagues.

The notion of organised formal competitions between clubs such as cups and leagues was not a novel one, but resistance to it was one of the foundations of the RFU's stance on amateurism. Leagues represented everything that was at the root of the 'evils' of professional sport, in which the ends take precedence over the means. It was the increasing desire to win at all costs rather than the spirit in which the game was played that concerned the RFU. It was the introduction of the formal competitions that had led to the professionalisation of soccer at the end of the 19th Century and it was cups and leagues that were associated with the professional code of rugby. Following the 1895 split, some form of league system had been proposed on a number of occasions. When Bristol made such a proposal in 1900, the weight of opinion was firmly against the idea of leagues and the demarcation between the two codes stood firm. But by the 1960s, attitudes had changed and the belief that leagues were inherently wrong was no longer universally held.<sup>44</sup> The RFU attempted to retain its authority over the clubs but was forced to make a number of concessions, and with each concession its position was weakened. In 1963, the formation of a Floodlit League, which included Bristol and a number of Welsh clubs, was sanctioned but with the warning that, "the Union strongly disapproved of the formation of leagues of any description as being contrary to the best interests of the game."<sup>45</sup> There is little doubt that it was the leading clubs who



were behind the moves to introduce cups and leagues and were significant in promoting any changes in outlook. In 1969, the Association of Gate-Taking clubs began to put pressure on the RFU to organise more formal competitions.<sup>46</sup> The RFU maintained its stance and argued that amateurism was not consistent with formal competitions: "The RFU...considers that such steps are not in the best interest of this, an amateur game."<sup>47</sup> Unfortunately the RFU was rather out of touch with the way rugby was being played at the top level:

If you looked at the background from which the members of the RFU came, they largely emanated from the constituent unions. In many, many cases, without any disrespect, the personnel had not played high level of rugby and they did not understand the competitive nature of rugby. You are a long time as an administrator so somebody could come in the middle 1950s and still be having a major influence in the middle 1980s.

*John White*

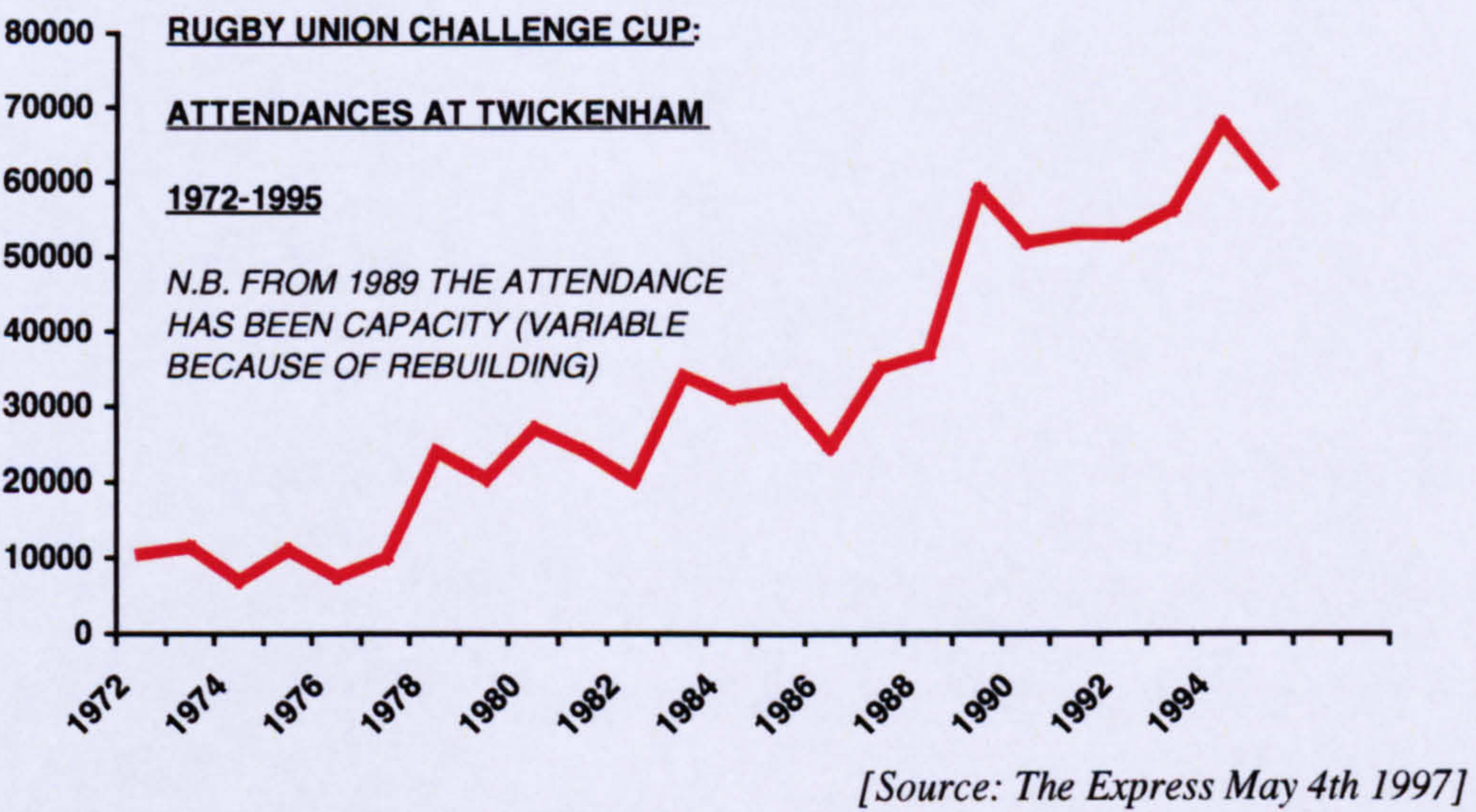
Concerned that they needed to reach some accommodation with the Senior Clubs rather than face another schism, an under-pressure RFU set up a special sub-committee to look at ways of introducing some kind of competitive championship. After two years of deliberations, they chose what they saw as the lesser of two evils and the 'National Knock-Out Competition' began in 1972. The first RFU Knockout Cup was a relatively insignificant affair as there was no sponsorship or marketing of the competition permitted, nor was there in fact a cup. An offer by former England player Derek Robbins to provide trophy, money and other prizes was rejected and the TV coverage was restricted to edited highlights the following day. It was an attempt by the RFU to diminish the seriousness of the competition, fearful that any tangible rewards would corrupt the players and the sport. To some extent, this low-key approach ensured that the players and spectators did not make this first final a momentous occasion. Only 10,500 spectators attended the first final at Twickenham for the match between Moseley and Gloucester. The captain



of the victorious Gloucester team Mike Nichols, recalled that for the players it was little more than another match:

The Cup was a novelty then, which added spice to the season...it was impossible to imagine any two clubs being able to fill Twickenham then...We got a little extra playing kit if I remember rightly and perhaps two beers instead of one as a win bonus.<sup>48</sup>

Although it was slow to take off at first, there can be little doubt that this competition was a significant step forward in the development of rugby. The following graph demonstrates how the popularity of this tournament has grown since its inception, with the 1995 final grossing £1 million in ticket sales.



The Knockout Cup was attractive enough to draw major sponsorship in rugby, and in 1975 it became known as the John Player Cup, with the Tobacco Company providing the sum of £100,000. The RFU was adamant that this incursion into its true amateur ideals would in no way affect the overall position of the sport. However, once the companies became involved, rugby became increasingly dependent on revenue from sources other than club affiliation fees and spectators and this ultimately led the sport further towards commercialism. Despite the fact that the RFU had conceded the point on the formation of a cup



competition, it remained determined to prevent the formation of leagues. However, it was powerless to prevent newspapers from publishing unofficial league tables and the presentation of a trophy to the 'top' club. There was a strong feeling amongst the RFU that some of the Gate-Taking clubs were persisting in trying to form a league and in 1970 a special sub-committee was formed to investigate the issue. At regular intervals there would be a pronouncement, almost a plea, from Twickenham that although amateurism may be old fashioned, it was vital to the future of the sport that the amateur principles were retained and the dangers involved in abandoning the friendly fixtures should be recognised.

...if it is to survive as an amateur game it needs to be played in the right spirit: a platitude that is often ignored or even caricatured in a materialistic world. The game itself is unpretentious however before a crowd there is a danger that it may become a tournament for gladiators or a business for entertainers.<sup>49</sup>

Throughout the 1970s, there were warnings to clubs that the RFU would not allow the formation of any form of regular league. However the creation of the Mallaby Committee in 1973 to look at the whole organisation of the RFU in "light of changing circumstances since 1945," indicates that there was a need for change which may have suggested to the clubs that the RFU was in a position of weakness. It should be stressed that although the RFU is a democratic organisation in so far as at any General Meeting each club has one vote regardless of its size or playing strength, the reality is that without the top clubs it is not a meaningful organisation. The top clubs, therefore, were far more powerful and if they had broken away from the Union it would have had a seriously detrimental effect on the RFU. The strength of feeling amongst the leading clubs towards leagues was indicated by the formation of unofficial merit tables in various parts of the country. These differed from leagues in that the overall winner was the team that had the best record (as a percentage) against other teams in the table. In other words, they

were built on existing fixtures and gave the matches a little extra edge. In 1974, the RFU decreed that these should not be regarded as official leagues and that publication of them should be discouraged. In reality, there was little the RFU could do to prevent clubs from joining these merit tables and faced with a *fait accompli* they agreed to the concept and allowed four regional tables to be established in 1976.<sup>50</sup>

Rather than ending the matter, this concession enabled the movement towards fully-fledged league rugby to gather momentum. A playing sub-committee was charged with looking into the development of league rugby. Two main reasons were given by the RFU for their change of heart on this issue; pressure from major clubs for greater competition and the need to improve the quality of play at representative level. Further, it was recognised that although most committee members had a great aversion to leagues, the fact was that virtually all other rugby playing countries had them and, therefore, the question had to be asked as to whom was out of step? League rugby, it was concluded, was more compatible with the present environment. The sub-committee came to a number of conclusions in 1981:

1. There was a need to help the ambitious player to get to the top. There should be two routes, either with a Premier Club or through County and Divisional Rugby.
2. That there should be a democratic system for clubs to find their right level. The Merit Tables were seen to be too self-protecting and, therefore, a pyramid league structure should be put in place.
3. During the season there should be only nine league games and it was suggested the Knockout Cup be phased out as this would lead to too many competitive matches. The rest of the fixtures should be 'friendly' plus county and divisional matches, trials and England matches.
4. That rugby must remain an amateur game: It was recognised that time is the 'basic currency' of the game and that it must not be abused. Although for an



amateur sportsman to get to the top he must make many personal sacrifices, this must be of his choosing.

5. That a League system should start in 1983/84.

Your Committee believes, however, that while cognisance should be taken of the past and what we believe to be the inherent virtues of our game, it would be folly to “stand still” and ignore the competitive environment in which our young men are brought up today. This we believe to be the crux of our Report – either we progress, keeping abreast of modern life and in anticipation of the future, or we “stand still” which in reality means going back.<sup>51</sup>

In 1987, a pyramid structure, the Courage League, was established in England that involved virtually all clubs. Their position in the leagues was dependent upon previous records, thus enabling the Senior Clubs to occupy the top leagues. Despite attempts to protect their position (for example no relegation in the first year), within a relatively short space of time, reputations and status that had taken decades to establish, were shattered as clubs found their true level within the modern game. The establishment of leagues disturbed the tranquillity of English rugby. The phrase ‘sleeping giant’, is one that is often overused in the sporting context, however, it fits the way in which rugby was forced to come out of its self-induced coma. The potential that had remained dormant for so long was realised as clubs came to terms with their position in the new rugby era, with some, perhaps, guilty of over-confidence expecting the closed shop to continue very much as it had before.

The effect of the leagues was not immediate. Rugby writer Stephen Jones reported that on a visit to Northampton during the first season of league rugby for the fixture with Rosslyn Park, things were very much as they had always been. Most of the Northampton team were local men, the turnstiles were not opened until 20 minutes before kick-off and the match was mostly watched by a few hundred middle-aged, middle class men for whom the match was part of a

Saturday ritual that they had enjoyed since they had stopped playing themselves.<sup>52</sup> If there had been relegation at the end of that first season, Northampton would have been relegated; they won only one match and finished four points below the next club. The realisation of the vulnerability of this old and well-established club (formed in 1880) had a rejuvenating effect. They were one of the first clubs to modernise their structure and take advantage of the more professional possibilities of league rugby. When Jones returned at the start of the 1992/3 season, the ground was packed two hours before kick-off and a jazz band was entertaining the crowd. There were sponsored billboards and a TV gantry; the press was there in force as was the Mayor of Northampton and most of the Council. When the Northampton team came out to warm up, all identically dressed in their sponsored tracksuits, they were a far more cosmopolitan group than previously. Northampton finished that season as runners-up in the league, but the transformation had not been without its casualties. In 1990, a boardroom coup had removed the old guard who had been Northampton men for years but who had stuck to the amateur principles for too long. The new era required men who thought of the future not the past and who were prepared to put fresh ideas into practice and support them financially. Northampton was the first club to employ a full-time Director of Coaching and, although the amateur laws prevented Barry Corless from coaching the 1st XV, he could direct others (and bizarrely coach the players provided there were not fifteen of them):

When leagues first came in they [Northampton] had a disastrous time. They asked me in my role of RFU Technical Adviser for advice on the role of Director of Coaching and I said I would be interested in the job as I'd virtually written the job spec. In order to do this they had to oust the old committee at the AGM. It was remarkable that they could do this to get a 75% majority at the AGM to get rid of people like Don White and Bob Leslie. Real characters who had served the club, man and boy. It was a turning point in the game in many ways.

*Barry Corless*



The Club also set out to recruit players from further afield and although not permitted to openly offer money, they were lawfully able to arrange employment, which for many players was sufficient inducement. In this way, they were able to persuade one of the most famous All Blacks of all time, Wayne Shelford, to join Northampton. This was an inspired move that not only helped develop the current players at the club, but also demonstrated the seriousness of their ambitions to potential sponsors and players.

When we got promotion it was important we got more experience in the side. The committee and local businessmen were very good at finding jobs for people locally... People like Tim Rodber, Ian Hunter, Nick Beal, and Matt Dawson were players that we found for the club. We sold a vision of the club. The new committee was more professional in terms of their organisation. If they wanted something they would find a way to do it. They were very driven to resurrect the fortunes of the club. ...They helped us put together a package with Keith Barwell and Cotton Oxfords that effectively employed Wayne Shelford ... His attitude to training was totally different. For an hour and a half he was working and fun came outside of that time, he was preparing for a Saturday and it was serious. That very quickly rubbed off on the other players, it was this attitude that we are here to win and we train to win. He brought a hard edge to the club, a lot of players were still coming to the club very much for social reasons, you met your mates, trained quite hard and played quite hard and then drank quite hard with your mates afterwards. It was what the game was all about and his was just a different sort of attitude.

*Barry Corless*

Although Northampton suffered a hiccup in 1994/5 when they were relegated, they immediately won promotion the following year. An indication of the success of the revolution that took place within the club was that they supplied the coach and five players to the 1997 British Lions. This figure can also be used to show how leagues affected different clubs, such as London Welsh who were a club in a similar position to Northampton in the 1970s, in that they supplied seven of the players to the 1971 British Lions. At that time, they had no difficulty in attracting the best players and J.P.R. Williams was one such player who was drawn to the club primarily because of the exciting style of rugby they played.<sup>53</sup> When league



rugby began in 1987, they were a club living on past reputations in Division One and spectacularly failed to adjust to the demands of modern rugby. By 1993 they were playing in Division Five.

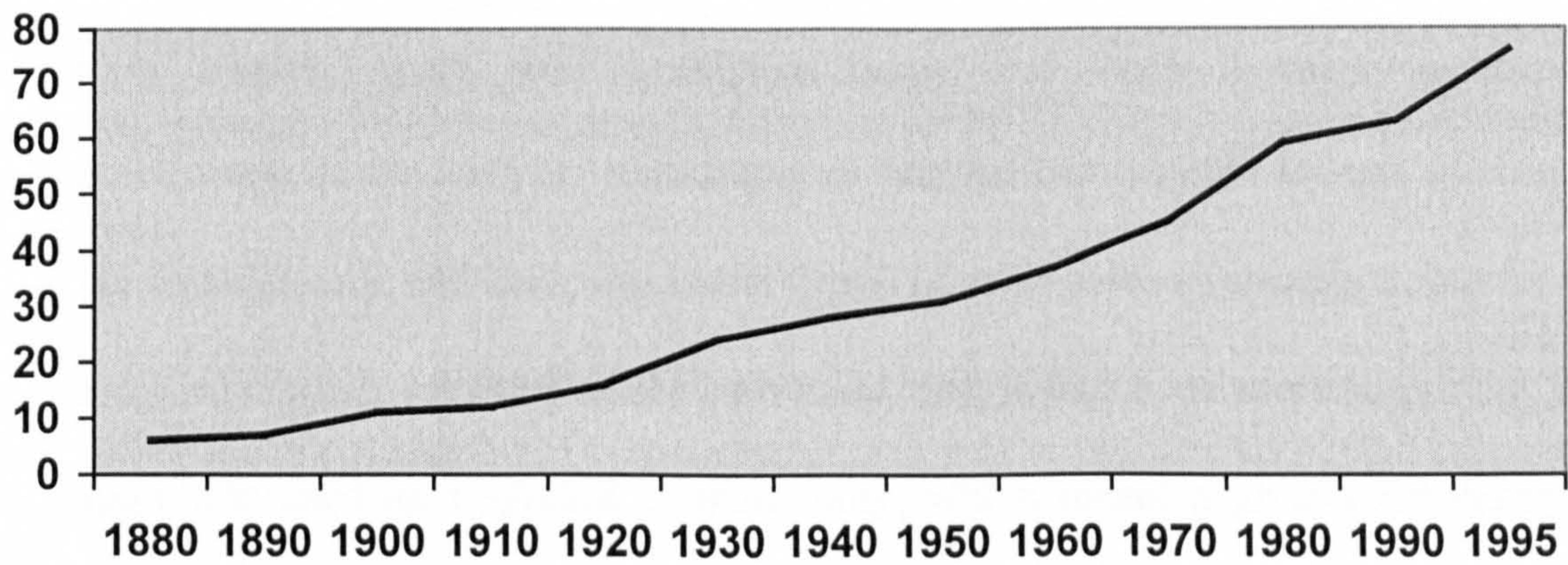
**International Pressure**

The success of sporting globalisation is spectacularly marked by the fact that, in terms of member countries, three of the four largest international organisations are sports organisations.<sup>54</sup> The ranking is as follows;

- 1. International Amateur Athletic Association -184 members
- 2. United Nations -180 members
- 3. Federation Internationale de Football Associations -178 members
- 4. International Olympic Committee -171 members

The globalisation of rugby can be demonstrated from the following graph, which shows the growth in the number of Unions during each decade since 1871 to the end of the amateur era. This shows a steady diffusion of rugby, which gathered pace after the First World War and further spurts in the last 25 years of amateur rugby.

**NUMBER OF UNIONS: 1880-1995**





Rugby union has developed from a peripheral sporting institution to one which is of great significance in a number of nations, notably Great Britain and Ireland, France, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa. In 1997, Sky Television used rugby as part of its package of sport, in which it featured “Britain versus The Rest Of The World”. Despite the obvious hyperbole of this pronouncement, there has been an enormous amount of interest throughout society in these sporting competitions.

Although New Zealand, South Africa and to a lesser extent Australia, have been the dominant playing powers since the early part of the last century, it is only in the last few decades that they have been in positions of real authority in the sport. To some extent this began in 1958, when these three countries were given two seats each and full status on the IRB. As a result the seven members (England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales being the others) were now almost equal. Almost equal in the sense that there were still colonial attitudes within the IRB and the three Southern Hemisphere nations were unhappy with the title “Dominion Members”. This slight was acknowledged in 1962 and from then on all nations involved were referred to as “Member Unions.”<sup>55</sup>

The troubles that the RFU faced at home in trying to maintain rugby as a truly amateur sport, were multiplied many fold when it came to keeping amateurism as the unifying philosophy of international rugby. At least in Britain, the amateur code had been the central theme of sport since its inception, but for the more egalitarian societies of the newer nations, it had been more important that sport was used as a symbol of their unity, which meant a greater emphasis on accomplishment. The decades from 1960 saw a succession of threats to the authority of the IRB and the RFU. Although the Southern Hemisphere nations

were outwardly in support of amateurism and even up to 1995, were involved in drawing up new laws to address the problem, they were also at the forefront of moves to make the sport more serious, competitive and therefore professional. It can be seen that although the IRB was constantly on its guard against outright professionalism, it was also embracing many of the wider aspects of the concept. Authority was exercised on numerous occasions and warnings were given to several countries; to South Africa regarding two professional leagues (1961); to Romania for the rather broad crime of not conforming to amateur principles (1967); to all nations with regard to professional coaching (1968) and to Fiji for allowing players to have 'try outs' with American Football teams (1971). A proposal to set up a World Championship was rejected in 1969, a concept that became part of most sports' international calendar, but was resisted by the IRB until 1987. It was the influence of the Southern Hemisphere teams and players that posed the real threat, for just as hegemony in society comes from the elite, so it is the same in sport. It is those who are considered to be the 'best' who determine how the sport should be played. As international rugby became more serious, it was the top nations that others looked to for leadership, and so their ways become accepted as the norm. The practices that had been commonplace in New Zealand, Australia and South Africa gradually became absorbed into the competitive international arena. In 1967, it was agreed that the 'Australian Dispensation' and use of replacements in international matches should be adopted for the coming season. These changes greatly affected the way the sport was played and approached over the next three decades. In an attempt to learn some of the secrets of success, the RFU sent Don Rutherford to New Zealand and Australia with the Lions in 1966, to assess the coaching set up in those countries. The players were

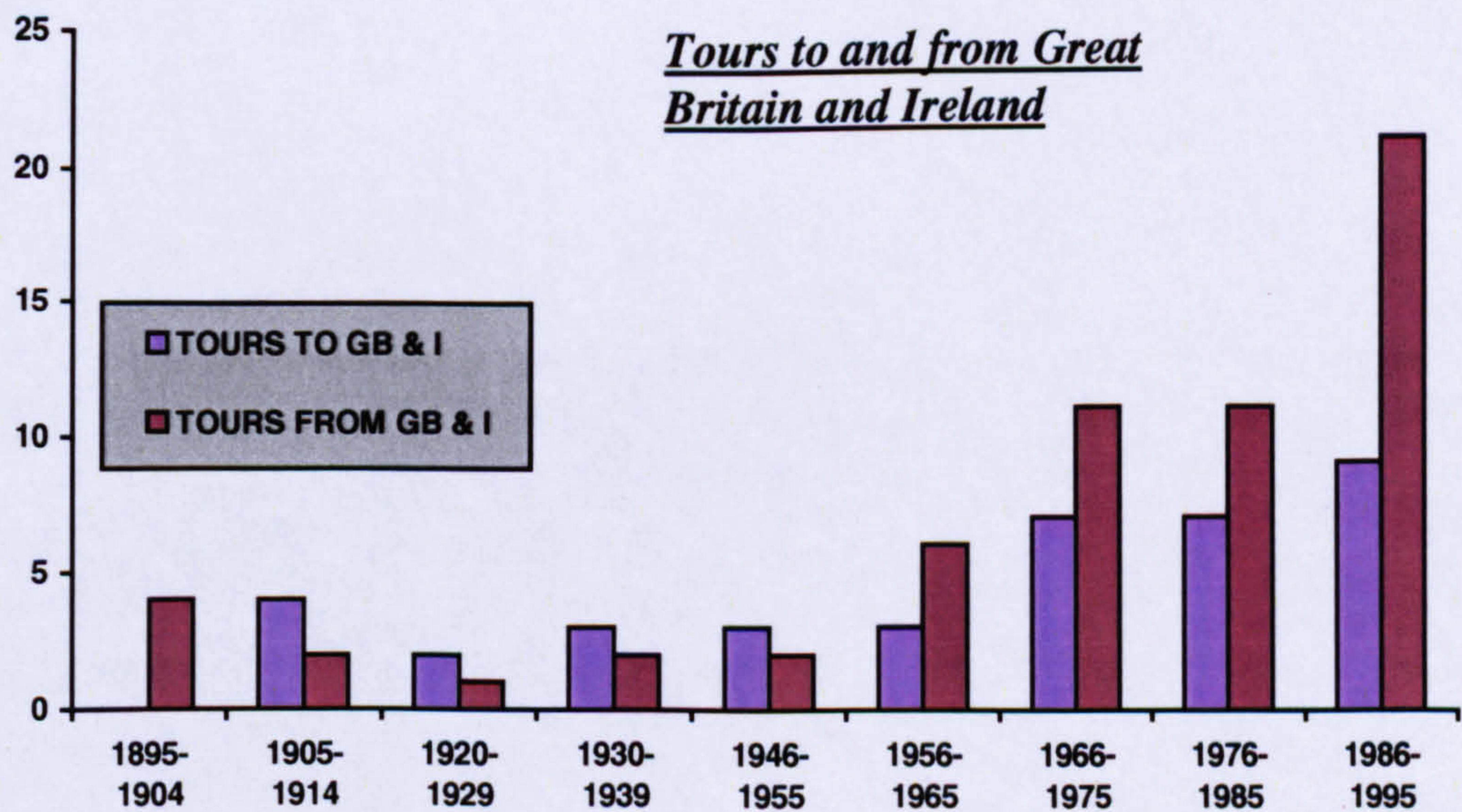


also keen to pass on their experiences from tours and in 1972 a conference was hosted by several British Lions to inform players of the lessons that could be learned. The fact that 350 players attended this conference suggests that many were keen to embrace new modes of behaviour.<sup>56</sup>

From the 1960s onwards, the importance of team preparation was recognised and as a consequence countries established squad systems and employed coaches and subsequently demanded greater commitment from their players. Time spent away from work and family was further increased as developments in transport enabled tours to and from other rugby playing countries to proliferate. The authority of the RFU, that had remained largely unchallenged since 1871, was gradually being threatened as the escalating playing power of the Southern Hemisphere countries led them to question the ability of the existing organisation to fulfil their requirements. With an increasing amount of international rugby fixtures, the influence of the Southern Hemisphere sides on the way the game should be played and administered was augmented. The playing ability of the national teams from New Zealand, South Africa and Australia had been acknowledged since their first tours of the British Isles in 1905, 1906 and 1908 respectively. The travelling distances involved meant that the influence of the Southern Hemisphere teams was only felt once every generation and for most people, the exploits of the British Lions on their reciprocal tours were only covered by newspapers at a later date. Jet travel and television allowed the influence of the Southern Hemisphere teams to be felt more regularly and observed by more people. One of the effects of globalisation was an increase in the number of international competitions in all sports, and rugby was no exception. Prior to 1960, there had only been four tours to Britain by each of the All Blacks,



Springboks and Wallabies whilst the British Lions had toured thirteen times. It is interesting to note the spread of these tours; seven in the first nineteen years and then only six tours in the next fifty years. Between 1960 and 1995, the British Lions visited their former colonies on twelve occasions and the British Isles and Ireland hosted twenty tours by these countries. New Zealand had visited eight times, Australia had visited seven times and despite being exiled from international competition for some of this period, South Africa had visited five times. The following graph clearly shows how the balance of power between the Northern and Southern Hemispheres was changing. In the late 19th Century, the Southern Hemisphere teams were grateful to visit their colonial masters and learn as much as they could from them. The tours undertaken by the Lions were regarded as missionary work by the home unions, but the roles had reversed and it would appear that from the 1960s, the British teams needed to learn from the Southern Hemisphere opponents. Overall, the British and Irish Lions have won only six series in total and the only period of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century that Britain could realistically claim to have been the best in the world was in the early 1970s.<sup>57</sup>



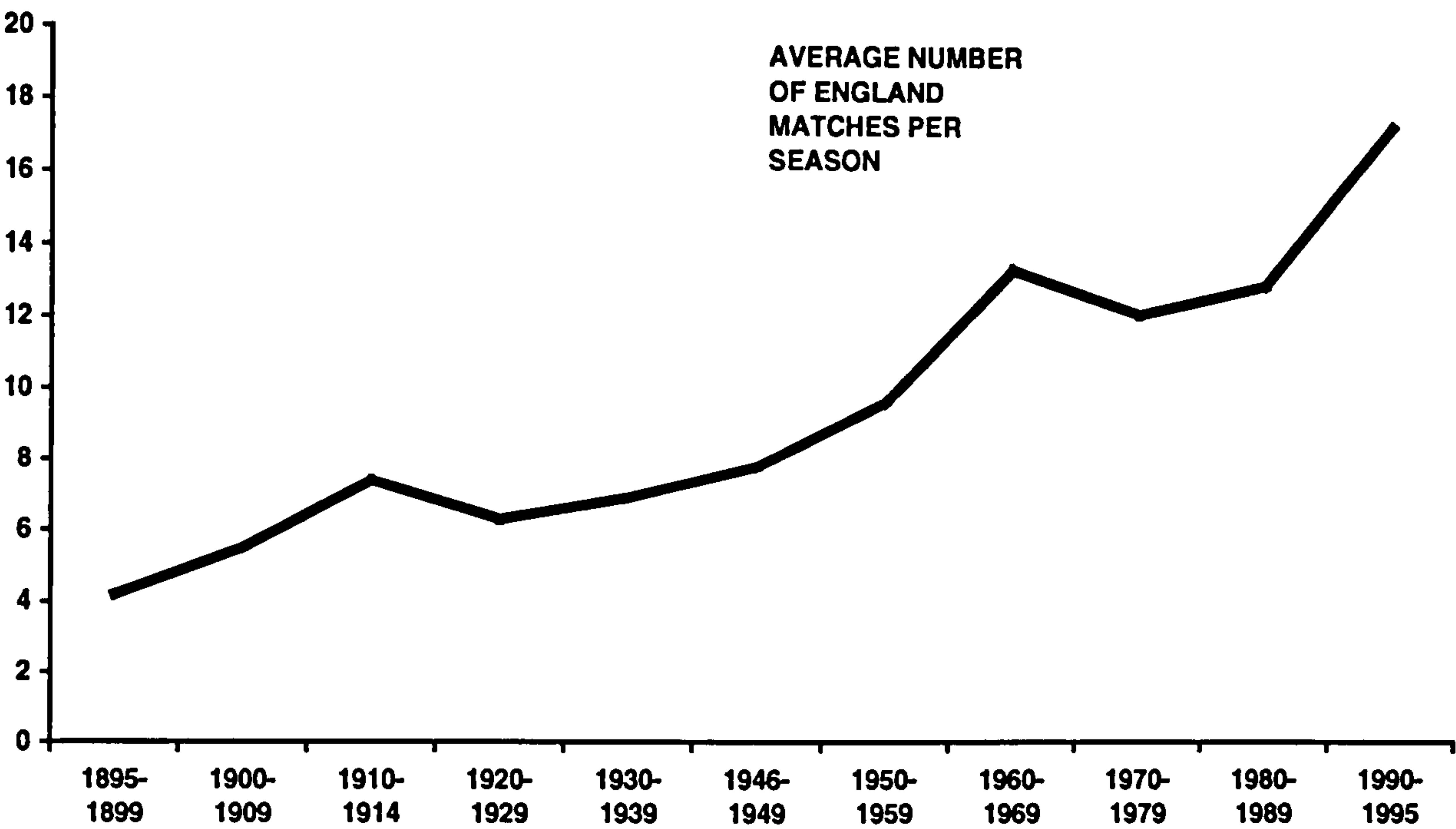


There was a steady increase in matches between the rugby playing nations with spurts in the 1960s and 1990s, the first of which can be explained in terms of the benefits of living in the jet age. The British Lions tour of South Africa in 1955, was the first to be made by air and although the journey took thirty six hours and six stops, it was still two weeks quicker than going by sea.<sup>58</sup> The reason for the increase in the number of matches during the 1990s is due to rugby's development as a commercial sport and the need to maximise profit by playing more matches. From 1960 onwards the home nations toured independently in addition to tours as Great Britain and Ireland. The two major reasons for undertaking national tours were firstly, to develop playing strengths and secondly, for financial reasons. It is clear that these increases in international competition put more demands on the players and over the years this led to discontent amongst some of the players because the tours became less like holidays and more like work. Although large sums of money were generated, the players were still expected to remain amateurs and maintain a career outside of rugby. The financial backers of international rugby were, therefore, either the employers who would give players time off for training, playing and travelling without cutting their wages, or the players themselves who financially subsidised the trips. One of the leading players of the time "King" Barry John discovered the cost of touring:

When I returned to Wales [after touring South Africa with the Lions in 1968] I had a fine suntan and not much else; neither job nor money...I had always imagined that I would never have any difficulty in getting a job. People had always said to me that as a Welsh international and British Lion, I would have doors opened for me and jobs would be available, as fruit in a dish...It was two or three weeks before the realisation really penetrated that I should have to go out and find a job myself...I stood in the queue to sign on and collect my dole.<sup>59</sup>

In the thirty-six seasons from 1960, the eight major nations played each other a total of 486 times compared to 266 matches during the same number of

seasons before 1960, an overall increase of 82.7%. This graph shows how the demand on England players increased gradually during the amateur era.



Tours enabled the Unions to develop the rugby playing power of their country by exposing the players to a wide range of other teams on a regular basis. An unforeseen consequence of this was that the players were able to see at first hand how other countries interpreted the amateur regulations. When players experienced the different attitudes and practices, it made them even more disgruntled with the home unions. Gareth Edwards was invited to play for a World XV in South Africa as part of their Centenary celebrations and saw how the efforts of the players were appreciated. The players stayed at the best hotels, all expenses were put down to the room numbers, they were given a blazer, trousers, two pairs of shoes, underpants, boots, track suits, badges, cuff links and a jersey for every match to exchange with opponents. This did not compare favourably with Britain where some Home Unions still made their international players make a token contribution to their (one) playing kit.<sup>60</sup> The top players, particularly those from



the Southern Hemisphere, were calling for rugby to become a fully-fledged commercial sport and wanted rugby to develop without the hindrances of what they regarded as the outmoded concept of amateurism. As long as the IRB held firm however, there was little that the players could do about it.

There were two main sources of potential revolution; entrepreneurs seeking to utilise the popularity of rugby for financial gain and South Africa simply looking for international fixtures. Because of the apartheid system, the rest of the World from 1975 boycotted South African sport. As a threat this had been a powerful sanction, but once applied it actually put South Africa in a powerful position within sport, as there were no further sanctions that could prevent them arranging any type of sporting tournament they wanted. The fanatical love the South Africans had for sport meant that there were a number of wealthy individuals who would go to any lengths to bring fixtures to their country. The two sports most at risk from any South African sponsored organisation were the ones that were at the heart of white South African culture, these were rugby and cricket. Cricket suffered from a number of rebel tours, which were a constant threat to the official tests between the members of the International Cricket Board. South Africa was quite prepared to ignore the rugby laws on amateurism in order to secure tours by the best players, and in 1983 there was a rugby tour by an invited 'International XV', followed in 1988 by a party of New Zealand internationals under the name 'Cavaliers'. The New Zealand players received a great deal of criticism for their participation on this tour, and it is highly unlikely that they would have been prepared to undertake such a risky venture in terms of their rugby futures without considerable financial incentives. Although there was an inquiry into allegations of professionalism, a code of silence amongst the players and a

probable reluctance by the administrators to actually expose professionalism meant that the issue was conveniently swept under the carpet. These tours only whetted the appetite of the South Africans, and in 1989 a British squad was invited to play two Tests against South Africa. Brian Moore suggests that there were two levels of negotiations in progress simultaneously. One was the official negotiation between the boards of the home unions and the other was an unofficial approach that recognised that the players were unlikely to participate without being well rewarded. At the conclusion of the parallel negotiations, the International Board sanctioned the tests and the players were secretly promised around £40,000 (£55,000 in 2000) for their participation. However the RFU had heard about the money being offered and attempted to ensure that the players would receive only the £12 a day they were officially allowed. When it became apparent this was not going to happen, the RFU made it clear that if any England player participated on the tour they would never play for their country again. While rugby was an amateur game they had the power to do this, as the law applying to restraint of trade did not apply. Eventually, a World team (without England players) was put together to fulfil the fixtures.<sup>61</sup> The New Zealand Rugby Union ostensibly carried out an inquiry into allegations of professionalism, but perhaps unsurprisingly considering their best players were involved, was unable to find any evidence. The IRB were forced to accept these findings, the alternative was to suspend or ban New Zealand and South Africa, which would effectively have meant two of the most powerful rugby nations would inevitably become professional.

The IRB did not heed these warnings or those that had come from cricket and the Kerry Packer affair. They continued to treat the players, the providers of all the income for the sport, with little respect and created an opportunity for David



Lord to emulate Kerry Packer by organising a rugby circus in 1984. To some extent the timing for such a venture was ideal, the intransigence of the IRB had particularly disappointed the elite players. A proposal of a Rugby World Cup and other key issues that would have modernised the sport had been sidelined once again by the rugby authorities. Lord offered 200 selected players around A\$180,000 each (approximately £130,000 in 2000), to effectively sacrifice their amateur careers to participate in the "World Championship Rugby" by playing games in Europe and Australia. Jean Pierre Rives, like many other players took a practical approach to the overtures, enjoying the hospitality and attention shown and listening to what was on offer:

If David Lord had got the money and all the arrangements together, I would have joined. I was ready to sign to play for him. I knew it would have been the end of my amateur career. But despite that, I was ready to go.<sup>62</sup>

It was only a combination of poor organisation by Lord and sheer good luck that this did not succeed. Ultimately, Lord's plan failed because he was unable to find the financial backers quickly enough to satisfy the naturally cautious players. It was not that the players were devoted to the amateur concept, but rather that they were not prepared to relinquish their positions at the highest level unless the rewards were worthwhile. This very real threat did serve to influence the International Board in changing its views. One year later in 1985, they announced that a Rugby World Cup would take place in 1987. Although they were alarmed at how exposed they had been to a professional circus, the IRB still did little to alleviate the major concerns of the players regarding financial recompense and the second class treatment they received. Rather than deal with the philosophy that was at the heart of the problem, they chose to make concessions. Rives warned that a realistic approach to the quandary must be taken:

Let us have less hypocrisy and more pragmatism on this subject. I am for the sport of amateur rugby but today, even for players on tour, there must be help to make sportsman secure after playing, because when you are 30 your life is not finished... Players give a lot of time between the ages of 10 and 30. So they must be helped in social, public or private ways... Writing books is not professionalism. The professional is a man who is paid for playing, ... that is the kind of professional system which David Lord proposed. The only mistake Mr. Lord made was that he did not have the money. But if he had found the money the players would have supported him.<sup>63</sup>

Brian Moore argues that the RFU were not really in favour of the concept of a World Cup and only agreed to it when they realised the rest of the world would go ahead anyway. Despite the moves towards a professional approach to the game amongst the English players, the majority still looked on the first tournament in 1987 as just another tour, and regarded it as an extended holiday with a group of like-minded people and to play a little rugby along the way.<sup>64</sup> This first tournament involved sixteen invited teams and was seen by many as an interesting experiment. There was little publicity before the event and sales of travel packages around the world were almost exclusively generated by the Five Nations of England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales and France plus the two host nations of New Zealand and Australia. A total of 1,679 supporters from England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland and France, as well as several hundred New Zealanders and Australians crossing the Tasman Sea, travelled to the tournament.<sup>65</sup> New Zealand defeated France 29 - 9 in the final at Eden Park in Auckland to become the first Rugby Champions of the World. Important as this victory was for New Zealand, the success of this first tournament meant that the event could continue, paving the way forward for what was to be a hugely successful event in 1991.

The second World Cup was a joint venture, hosted by England, France, Scotland, Ireland and Wales. It was recognised that to continue with an invitational format would be elitist and unfair to emerging nations. As a result, therefore, eight



qualifiers from thirty-two other nations joined the eight quarter-finalists of 1987. The growing strength of the rest of the world was demonstrated when Wales (semi-finalists in 1987) failed to qualify from their group in 1991 and were forced to enter the qualifying rounds for the 1995 tournament. Australia beat England 12 - 6 in the final at Twickenham to keep the world rugby crown in the Southern Hemisphere. For the organisers, the 1991 World Cup was a great success with over 14,000 overseas packages being sold.

A transformation in authority was to manifest itself in the law changes that were pushed through by the Southern Hemisphere unions and by the gradual dismantling of the amateur ethos. Brian Moore suggests that in 1993 there was a shift in power, as the International Rugby Board Laws Committee changed the laws of the game in order to make it quicker and more attractive to watch. It could also be suggested that part of the reason behind this was the success of some teams (particularly England) in winning matches by tight forward play that was effective but not entertaining. It was a move that initially, at least, met with a great deal of resistance from players in the Northern Hemisphere. The game was not being developed for the players or coaches under the jurisdiction of the RFU, but in the interests of the administrators in the Southern Hemisphere. The challenge that New Zealand and Australia were facing from the more spectacular rugby league tournaments, forced them to improve the attractiveness of rugby union and make it the major sport in their countries. Will Carling, who was the England Captain for the last seven years of the amateur period, was under no illusions about who controlled international rugby:

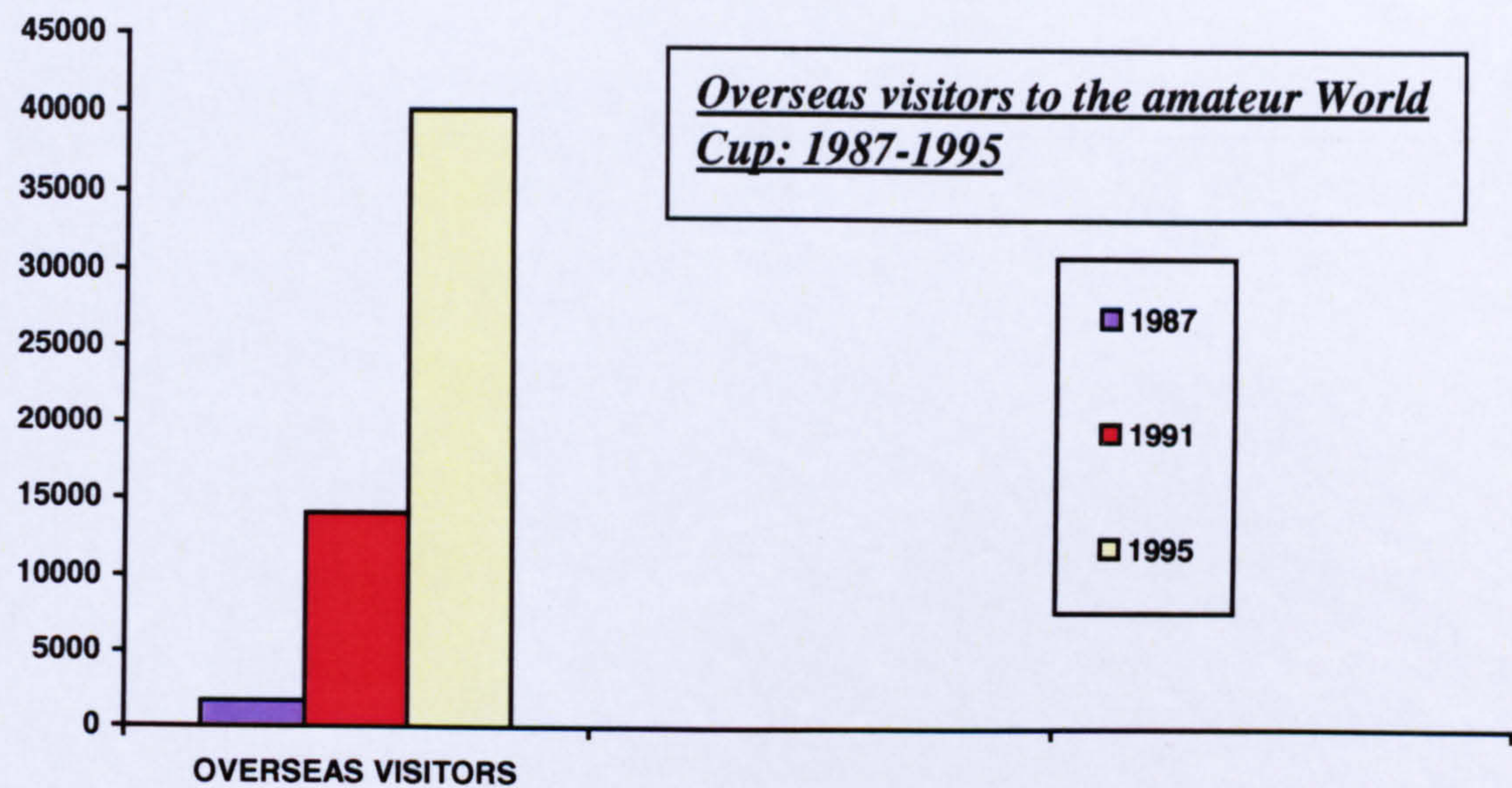
They [the RFU Committee] believed that the RFU controlled world rugby, set the moral tone, whereas the truth was that all the big decisions were being taken by the Southern Hemisphere countries. New Zealand, South Africa and Australia

were dictating the shape of the game on the pitch with law changes and forcing the rest of the world to face up to other issues off the pitch.<sup>66</sup>

The termination of the apartheid system in South Africa allowed the sporting ambitions of the country to be restored and as recognition of the progress they had made, the 1995 World Cup was hosted for the first time by one nation. Forty-three countries entered the qualifying rounds between 1992 and 1994. The top eight in the previous tournament, plus the host Union South Africa, qualified automatically. The importance of victory for the host nation cannot be overstated. Nelson Mandela had been transformed from the vehemently anti-Springbok prisoner of 1974, when he and other prisoners clustered around radios and risked the wrath of the guards by urging on the British Lions, to a passionately supportive President in 1995. Mandela was presented to the teams before the final, wearing a Springbok cap and the borrowed rugby shirt of the captain Francois Pienaar. Rugby, a sport that had previously been strongly identified with the apartheid system, was being used to unite the South African people. There have been allegations that the desire for a South African victory led someone to poison the New Zealand team, leaving them unable to compete fully in the final which resulted in a victory for South Africa 15-12.<sup>67</sup> The ramifications of such a deed indicated that, although rugby was still an amateur sport, there was now far more to it than 'fun'. It was a tournament that surpassed the previous two as a spectacle and drew more spectators and television viewers. According to the South African Tourist Board, nearly 40,000 overseas visitors arrived in South Africa before and during the World Cup. The following graph shows the increasing draw of the World Cup for overseas visitors. The 1995 World Cup was broadcast to one



hundred and twenty four countries and an estimated 2.67 billion watched the event.<sup>68</sup>



(Source of figures: RWC Homepage).

Although a late starter, the Rugby World Cup had, in the space of eight years, become one of the major events in the World’s sporting calendar, and the impact that the World Cup had on the amateur ethos was enormous. With each succeeding tournament the amount of money, media attention and demands on the players increased. The success of the World Cup signalled the end of the concept of amateurism. Tony Hallet the RFU Secretary in 1995 acknowledged this threat:

It remains to be seen whether the game can withstand the considerable pressure from the world of commerce that is bound to come after the World Cup.<sup>69</sup>

In fact, the concession that the IRB made to retain control over the players had simply increased the demands on the players, leading to ever-greater time professionalism. This, in turn, almost inevitably meant that the players wanted their time and effort rewarded. It was the introduction of formalised competitions



at club and international level that was a catalyst that accelerated the development of professionalism in rugby. Primarily, the demands on the top players increased as rugby was played in a far more serious and dedicated manner, with extensive preparations in terms of fitness, diet, and coaching and tactical awareness. Stephen Jones reported that at the end of 1991, a programme was mapped out for the Development Squad for the 1995 World Cup, which demanded that players reach levels of fitness and strength previously associated with Olympic athletes. The players would attend coaching sessions on Sundays and midweek and they would be expected to attend coaching and training weeks at various camps around the world. Further, they would be required to take part in Divisional matches as part of a trial system; be available for international tours and be subjected to physical, technical and psychological tests that, if failed, would see them excluded from the squad. On top of all this they would also be expected to impress the selectors by producing good performances on a regular basis for their club sides.<sup>70</sup> The growing significance of the World Cup emphasised the contradictory nature of the expectations of the RFU. The players were obligated to prepare and play in a professional manner, but not to expect any financial rewards for their endeavours.

One England player recalled his preparations for the event:

Eighteen months before the World Cup, a giant scroll almost a yard long was pushed through my letterbox. That wallchart [his training programme] has dominated my life ever since. We were also given [in the same envelope] a reminder by the RFU; amateurism was to be strictly upheld.<sup>71</sup>

At the same time, the amount of money flowing into the sport also increased. This was partly due to the RFU relaxing its stance on sponsorship and commercialisation but was also the result of the high profile that rugby had developed. Rugby became commercially attractive to companies looking for maximum exposure from a sport that was primarily associated with the upper



echelons of society. The World Cup was one of the main attractions for the commercial sector, allowing them to be associated with a fast, exciting international sport and one that was watched by millions on television. The company responsible for the tournament, Rugby World Cup Limited were pleased to report:

As the game developed and gained popularity, the status of the Rugby World Cup as a premier, blue-chip sports event has increased. Accordingly, the commercial appeal of the Tournament has soared.<sup>72</sup>

The influx of money coming into the sport meant that for the first time, it was potentially possible for players to earn a reasonable living from playing rugby. The means were now there, all that was required was the will on behalf of the RFU and the IRB. The views of the players and their relationships with those in authority had undergone significant changes during the four decades leading up to 1995.

### Players

The period from 1960 onwards saw a gradual change in the power of the players. At the start of the decade the players accepted the authority of the RFU on all matters. The majority of players who simply enjoyed their Saturday recreation had little or no reason to question the authority of the RFU, and the issue of developing professionalism was not part of their agenda. For the elite players, the RFU held the key to advancement and few dared to challenge the status quo. The RFU was an authoritarian and paternalistic body, which very much dictated not only when and how players could take part in matches, but also took care of their moral welfare as this pronouncement in 1969 demonstrates:

Rugby union football, being a game, which encourages physical fitness, condemns pornography as a social disease. It has no place in our game since we recognise our responsibilities to young and virile players to whom we endeavour to set a correct standard of citizenship.<sup>73</sup>

In 1963, it had been decided that England players would no longer be given ties after their debut matches, but they were entitled to purchase them. Three decades later, not only were the leading players demanding ever greater freedom to earn money from their efforts, but they were so powerful that when the England captain referred to the committee as a “bunch of old farts” on television, the RFU were unable to do anything about it. Societal changes and the democratisation of rugby union changed the relationship between players and the RFU.

Since 1960, the base from which rugby clubs have drawn their players has widened as the traditional sources have declined. Rugby has had to compete with a far greater range of leisure activities that have become available to young men over this period. In the 1950s and 1960s, soccer had become socially acceptable and many grammar schools bowed to public pressure and offered both rugby and soccer to their pupils. The development of the comprehensive system of education from the late 1960s further exacerbated this problem. Even those clubs that had a good potential source of players via a local school found that the number of pupils going away to university increased. Recruitment was therefore a major problem, particularly for those who had been “Old Boys” clubs. Although many of these clubs were initially reluctant to go ‘open’, inevitably they were forced to do so or to fold due to lack of numbers. Camp Hill (Birmingham) was one club which was forced to relax its rules, despite initial resistance to the idea:

There was concern in the Club as regards recruitment - quantity and quality. A meeting was held on 4th December [1969] to consider the proposal to amend the rules in order to allow up to two associate members - non Old Boys - to play for each team. The whole question whether the Club should follow other Old Boys’ Clubs and “go open” or remain exclusive to scholars and masters of the school was discussed. The proposal was defeated 34 votes to 25 with 12 abstentions.<sup>74</sup>



As many of the new recruits to rugby union may not have been socialised into the gentleman amateur basis of the sport, they contributed to the pressure for change, but of greater significance were the changes that were affecting the elite players. Hegemony is almost always developed from the higher echelons of a culture and the attitude of the international players inevitably caused the recreational players to change their attitudes to playing. In the 1960s, the preparation of the England team reflected the amateur nature of the sport and selection was a very subjective affair, with players coming into the side from apparently nowhere and leaving just as quickly. In 1966, for example, the England selectors awarded thirteen new caps in the four games played; including three at scrum half.<sup>75</sup> There was little continuity in selection and with a large committee it was almost inevitable that there would be a degree of politicking. This view is supported by Clem Thomas a British Lion in 1955, who reported that a number of the British Lions squads for tours either side of World War II, contained players blatantly not up to the task. This he suggests “is not surprising considering the horse trading that goes on between selectors drawn from four different countries.”<sup>76</sup> It is also evident that the players came from a far wider range of clubs than is the case today. When a sport becomes professional, there is a tendency towards a form of sporting Darwinism in which the best players gravitate towards the top clubs. This was not the case at the start of this period, and some of the clubs that the English players were drawn from are barely known today. Old Cranleighans, Percy Park, Durham City, Medicals and Torquay Athletic all had representatives in the England team of the 1960s. There were also more student representatives than today, not only from Oxford and Cambridge but also Durham, Manchester, Newcastle and Loughborough. An illustration of the lack of continuity of selection is

demonstrated by the fact that the record number of appearances by an England player prior to 1960 was thirty-one made by W.W. Wakefield (1920-1927). In soccer by this time, Billy Wright had made 105 appearances for England and there were many other players who had gained far more than 31 caps. When a sport is 'professional' it is more of a meritocracy and selectors cannot afford to reward players for endeavour or show loyalty to their club or region. The best players are selected and this is done in the most objective and organised manner possible. By the 1990s, international players had a far longer career and one poor performance was unlikely to result in a player being dropped. Players from this era such as Carling, Underwood, Andrew, Moore and Winterbottom comfortably doubled the number of caps held by Wakefield.

The manner in which players prepared for an international match also changed quite dramatically. Traditionally, British teams would meet the day before an international and after being introduced to each other, would discuss the tactics for the match. In 1957, the IRB had declared that the period between the assembly of a team and the playing of a match should not normally exceed forty-eight hours. This system was growing increasingly inadequate considering the pressure to perform and the national importance attached to the matches. When this principle was reaffirmed in 1969, it was slightly altered to reflect the changing circumstances. It was agreed that players could be brought together occasionally for squad training on the proviso that such occasions should not interfere with players' work or restrict their freedom as amateur players. Over the next twenty-five years this stipulation was gradually and conveniently ignored. The 1960s saw a shift in thinking that led to the recognition of the need for coaches. Winning was becoming increasingly important and a level of organisation was necessary to



achieve this. Wales became the first country to adopt national coaching and squad sessions in 1967, although the practice was not fully established until Clive Rowlands became the coach in 1968. Under the chairmanship of M.R. Steele-Bodger in 1967, England made their first tentative steps towards an organised system for the selection and preparation of the national team. Initially, these were in the form of coaching sessions after the trials, whose purpose was to impose a common pattern of play on players from different parts of the country.<sup>77</sup> By 1969, the IRB accepted that they did not have the authority to prevent teams from being coached and declared that, “voluntary amateur coaching is a sound feature of rugby union football.”<sup>78</sup> Also during that year, Don Rutherford was appointed Technical Director (with a remit to develop a coaching structure) and Don White was appointed England Coach. This led to set moves being developed and a greater emphasis on team strategy. This is an almost inevitable consequence of the adoption of a professional attitude. Players’ roles and responsibilities become more formal, and their freedom is curtailed as the performance of the team becomes more significant. However, not all of the players were prepared to change and move towards a new professional attitude. Ken Jones of Wales was reluctant to take part in the organised coaching sessions at the end of the 1960s and would take part in the warm up jogs then simply disappear. In 1971 before a match against Wales, Tony Bucknall (England flanker) was reading a book and smoking a cigarette when he asked, “I say, has anyone got a spare pair of boots?” Fortunately for the team, a spare pair was found.<sup>79</sup>

Gradually those players who maintained their rights as amateurs not to take their sport too seriously found themselves excluded from the upper echelons of the game and so such attitudes gradually became the residual hegemony amongst top

level players.<sup>80</sup> John Leyshon was a player who believed that he would gain more benefit from playing at a Junior rather than a Senior club and resisted their overtures:

I'd come back from Exeter, I'd probably had half a season maybe or a season at Camp Hill and I was playing reasonably well. I didn't want to go anywhere away from the club and the people that I'd grown up with. I didn't want to go somewhere where I was going to be told what I had to do. The atmosphere that I'd heard about at Moseley was that if you had have a bad game [for the 1<sup>st</sup> XV] you'd be playing in the 3rds the next game. I just couldn't afford the time either for something that I didn't really believe I was going to enjoy, compared with what I was doing which was, I suppose, a big fish in a little pool and loving it.

*John Leyshon*

For international rugby players and later club rugby players at most levels, it became increasingly important to have organised training sessions, which as amateurs had to be undertaken in their own time. By 1982, it had been recognised that in order to be successful at international level, players would have to reach new heights of physical fitness and Dick Greenwood was one of the first England coaches to work on the fitness of the players.

We just did what we were told. If we were told to go out and do 50 press-ups a day, we would do them. I'm not sure if it did us any good though.

*Bill Beaumont*

When I was playing at Coventry, there were fourteen or fifteen internationals in the club at that time so the standard of training was very high and it was also very competitive. The other thing that used to happen there that didn't happen at the lower level was that the good players stayed on after everyone else was gone and did extra, the Peter Preece's and David Duckham's... I can remember in my second year in the England side when New Zealand were coming over we had a fitness manual produced. It was very basic, step ups, press ups, number of laps round a pitch and so on. It did get us fitter but a lot of the players just ignored it. When it came to fitness testing a lot of players were 'injured' so they could miss it.

*Barry Corless*

It was quickly realised that in order to do this job properly, specialists would have to be brought in to the international set up. Tom McNab (who had trained Daley Thompson and other top athletes) was brought into the England coaching team. He had to drag some of the more reluctant players into a new era where fitness and



"professional" attitudes were required. However, some of the players in the England team still refused to adopt the required approach. Brian Moore suggested that even as late as 1986 it was still almost frowned upon to take rugby too seriously, even within the national squad. When Moore was challenging for a place in the full England team in 1985, the incumbent hooker was Steve Brain. Although Brain was a good player and should have kept his place for at least another two seasons, he was not able or willing to toe the line in the new era. Along with a number of others, Brain would question the value of conditioning and took part only reluctantly when required to do press-ups and sprint drills. He was, in many ways, a person in juxtaposition with the amateur and the professional eras. Players who were prepared to commit to the extra training and therefore become more effective players replaced those who were under achieving and not prepared to adapt to the new era.<sup>81</sup> Even at club level, pressure was put on players to attend an increasing number of training sessions as the clubs tried to produce "professional" teams:

When I was at Moseley the pressures certainly increased when we had a paid playing administrator in Alex Keay and that was because he was being paid, in effect, by results. The amount of training sessions increased from two a week to sometimes three a week and then he made an optional Sunday session available to players which I said I wasn't going to go to. This was frowned upon but I said "Well, we're still an amateur game, I think it's unreasonable."

*Ruari Maclean*

To examine the changing views regarding the way that rugby had developed and the pressures on the players from the 1970s, it is worth considering the opinions of three players from that era. Each is from a different country; Gareth Edwards of Wales, Mike Burton of England and Andy Irvine of Scotland. One of the most respected players of the modern era, Edwards, was one of the first to recognise that the sport had changed. In an international career from 1967-1978,

he had felt the developing pressures at first hand and retired from the sport because he felt he could no longer devote the time necessary to play at the top level. During his playing career, rugby became big business and the image of the players changed, with the most eye-catching individuals receiving the greatest amount of publicity. Players were being exposed more and more to the way players in other countries were treated and the way in which different unions interpreted the amateur laws. There was also the issue that although rugby was big business and the players were expected to produce high level performances, there were no official rewards available. Two decades before Will Carling described the English Committee as 'old farts', Edwards called for a more professional approach to running the sport. He argued that the administration of the game had to change, with the expertise of the commercial and legal world being crucial. It was suggested that although the administrators claimed to understand the modern game, in fact they knew little about the demands on modern players. In the 1960s, Scottish and Irish players were given only one international jersey for the season and if they indulged in the traditional swapping of shirts with their opponents, they had to pay for a replacement. Even in the 1970s, Scottish players had to pay a nominal amount for their kit, in order to safeguard their amateur status. Edwards called for a more generous attitude to international players, citing examples where the players stayed in inferior accommodation, had to pay for all telephone calls home, and, at the after match dinner, were allowed only one bottle of wine between four. This was scant reward for the entertainment they had provided for a capacity crowd in a match watched by millions on television. An indication of the growing dissatisfaction amongst the players was revealed in 1977, when the British Lions were asked to play against the Barbarians at Twickenham to raise



money for the Queen's Jubilee. Although they had originally agreed to the fixture, when they discovered that only the team and replacements would be invited to the celebrations, they refused to take part. Eventually, the organisers agreed that the whole squad and wives and girlfriends could attend, although they were booked into a modest hotel in Richmond. At the dinner, the players were expected to pay for their drinks, while those from the committees had free wine. Edwards was one of a number of players who prophesied that the events that were taking place in cricket (with Kerry Packer trying to take over the sport) could also happen in rugby. He suggested that the mood was right amongst players and that professional rugby football could become a reality and that it would inevitably lead to higher standards of play.<sup>82</sup>

Mike Burton attacked the dual standards of the administrators. As a player who had reached the highest levels (and then went on to make a large amount of money from sport as a provider of corporate hospitality) he is clearly someone who understands the commercial and playing sides of the argument. He argues that to prevent players receiving money from outside agencies is not logical when the unions themselves were receiving money from sponsors. Even players who had written autobiographies were branded as professionals. This meant that a huge amount of talent and experience (for example, David Duckham, Phil Bennett, Ian McLauchlan, Gareth Edwards, Mervyn Davies, Barry John and Fran Cotton) that could have been harnessed into coaching and administration was lost to the game. Burton suggested that there were ways in which players could make money from the game without it becoming a truly professional sport:

- Allow broken time payment, so that players could be paid for the time they had to miss from work to train and play.

- Allow players to receive money from outside agencies, who could use them to publicise their products or services.
- Allow players to write books about their experiences.

None of these issues represented outright professionalism in the same way that it was recognised in other major sports. There would still be no pay packets, no win bonuses and no increase in pressure upon players. It would simply be a recognition that rugby was changing and evolving and in order to keep the special character of the game, the notion of amateurism needed to evolve. Mike Burton recognised the incongruity of the situation in which everyone from the host union to the hotels and the hot-dog sellers was making money from rugby internationals. The thirty or so players who provided the entertainment were the only ones who didn't receive financial benefit despite hours spent training and sacrificing work and family commitments. In some countries, however, players were being rewarded for playing, with cash, jobs and housing available in France from the leading clubs (in fact, rugby union could offer more incentives than rugby league) and in Wales generous "expenses" were paid to players. At the beginning of his career, Burton received only minimal expenses from his club for kit. However, when he became an international, in a period when rugby players were becoming much higher profile, he started to receive greater and greater rewards. At first these rewards included the waiving of match fees and free training kit, but as the competition between sports companies developed, he started to find the boots they gave him would be full of £10 notes. In 1976, he received £250 to wear Adidas boots over the five internationals of the season. As he was playing in the relatively unglamorous position of prop, it is likely that other players were receiving far more. Even so, the figure was very low when compared to the rewards available to



those in other sports.<sup>83</sup> It was via the sports companies that players were able to obtain some recompense for their efforts, although it would appear that it was only the 'inner circle' of players who were able to command any fees:

With England we got some kit from Adidas. On a Thursday there'd be a bag of kit and you could get a pair of boots whenever you wanted. There was always talk about boot money and I think it was almost inevitable it was around but I was very much a junior and was just happy to get a pair of boots.

*Barry Corless*

On England tour when the court sessions, the players used to have to come up and say and put their hand, as if they were putting it on the Bible. They used to have to repeat after the Clerk to the Court, "I swear by Almighty Addidas the evidence I shall give shall be the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help me Addidas." Or if they were affiliated to Puma they would say "I swear by Almighty Puma".

*Steve Holdstock*

Andy Irvine of Scotland suggested that the attitudes towards the players were common to all the home unions. In the early 1970s, the wives and girlfriends of the players were largely ignored, but by the 1980s there was a more enlightened attitude towards them and their contribution was acknowledged by a special dinner and hotel accommodation paid for by the Union. Even this small gesture was subject to petty minded dogmatism:

After all, the players make a significant contribution to filling grounds for two or three internationals every year which bring in gate money of over a quarter of a million pounds per match and it was quite wrong in the past to scrimp when it came to looking after the players...For example one night after a match I've ordered a plate of sandwiches and coffee for myself another player and our wives. It came to £7.80 and I signed the bill for it, I later had to repay this to the Union.<sup>84</sup>

Irvine demonstrates that not all the players in the 1970s and 1980s were interested in receiving money for playing rugby and he was one of a number who felt able to resist the overtures of Rugby League. In 1974, he was offered £15,000 [£85,000] to sign as a professional for Wigan and even though at the time he was earning only £700 [£4,000] a year, he turned them down. Three years later he was offered £75,000 [£250,000] a year by Widnes, again he turned it down giving the reason

that he loved rugby union and playing for Scotland and his club too much to ever contemplate changing codes. Irvine was one of many involved in rugby who totally misread the developments that were gathering speed:

People have said that a World Cup, generating perhaps £20,000,000 in gate receipts, world-wide television rights and advertising, might be the first slippery steps towards a headlong slide in the direction of a professional game. I am sure that this is total poppycock. The tournament will be all over in less than a month. The teams will arrive, play four or five matches, watch the semi-finals and finals and then return home. At no stage can money possibly change hands and there is no rugby player in the world who would need any financial incentive before agreeing to take part in the first ever World cup. Such hallucinations are conceived in the fertile minds of neurotic daydreamers. Let me reassure such fantasizers, such Walter Mitty clones that people like myself have played and always will play rugby for the fun and enjoyment and that the game will always remain amateur. It is a rough, tough, physical game which brings together people of every race, creed and colour, from every possible socio economic background and with this totally cosmopolitan backcloth it is surely the greatest team game in the world. Rugby has survived for over a hundred years as an amateur sport and I fervently hope and believe it will survive the next hundred as well.<sup>85</sup>

During the last ten years of amateurism there were a number of ways that players were able to earn money from rugby. Some of these were sanctioned, but there was also widespread abuse ranging from money placed in boots to the almost overt professionalism in South Africa. Despite this fact, most of the unions and especially the RFU were still vociferously defending the amateur ethos. Increasingly, there were players who used the globalisation of rugby to enable them to play the sport in a number of countries. Some of these countries had less stringent approaches to the entire concept of professionalism. This included time spent in preparation for matches, the intensity of the competition and the financial remuneration of players. Brian Aston was one player who accepted employment in France and with it, the opportunity to experience a different type of rugby during the 1970s:

We trained two mornings a week and two late afternoons a week so that players were obviously in jobs whereby their employers were fairly liberal in terms of



giving them time off to train and I suspect those jobs had been sorted out by the club. Michelin ran the club, financed the club, and all the employees I suspect worked for Michelin in one guise or another.

*Brian Ashton*

In recent years a number of British players, such as Peter Winterbottom and Martin Johnson have travelled to New Zealand to further their rugby education. Whilst others such as Steve Holdstock and Clive Woodward found full-time employment in Australia. Possibly because of the rather stricter interpretation of the amateur laws, very few top class players moved to Britain to further their rugby careers. Italy, however, was a country to which some of the top Southern Hemisphere players moved during their close season. David Campese (who put 'Rugby Player' as his profession on his passport) and Michael Lynagh were players who found the financially rewarding approach of Italy an attractive proposition. The exposure of players to different cultures and their approach to amateurism almost inevitably had an influence on the attitudes of top players in Britain:

I'd always wanted to play in a different country. A contact had watched me play against Australia then made contact in 1985 and said "Do you want to come and play in Australia?" Both Clive Woodward and myself went off to play for Manley...You had to be as fit to play for Manley as you did to play for England. So the fitness levels were far greater – worryingly greater. If you got to the Grand Final you only played eighteen games in the season so every game was a cup final. To lose was disastrous, therefore it was intense, every week there was no easy game.

*Steve Holdstock*

The rugby authorities were almost certainly aware that if players were able to play rugby all year round in different countries, then they were either independently wealthy or a professional. Without acknowledging this fact, the RFU attempted to prevent this happening, first by banning players from playing in different hemispheres in the same calendar year and later by having a draconian league registration period for players moving to this country, regardless of their

nationality. In 1969, in an attempt to prevent a drift towards professionalism and to prevent players being tied to one club, the RFU had insisted that players should be free to leave or join clubs without hindrance. By the 1990s, the situation had changed to such an extent that there was a desire to avoid any hint of the development of a transfer system and a registration period of up to 120 days was used to prevent this. Rob Andrew was a leading player caught out by this law. He moved to France for business reasons but when he returned to England ten months later (again for business reasons), he was forced to spend most of his time in the 2<sup>nd</sup> XV.<sup>86</sup> The fact that such restrictions were totally against the spirit of amateurism was ignored by the RFU. How could those who were playing for fun and recreation be banned from doing this in as many different countries as they chose? It was another example of the contradictory attitude of the RFU. They refused to acknowledge players were no longer strictly amateurs yet introduced laws that were only necessary if the sport was professional.

One method of legally circumventing the amateur code in England was used by clubs such as Harlequins, Leicester and perhaps most successfully Bath, who were the dominant team at the end of the amateur era:

Bath were professional by choice in that players filled in their spare time by working on different aspects of the game including fitness that other players in other clubs didn't bother to do. The Bath players were ahead of the game and wanted to stay ahead of it.

*Brian Ashton*

Malcolm Pearce, a life long Bath supporter, believed it was the duty of the rugby community to take some responsibility for helping players balance their training needs with the requirements of their full-time career. Because Pearce was also Chairman of the Johnsons Group (a family business with interests in dairy farming, publishing, news and milk distribution and catering) he was able to



ensure that he was able to do his community service. At Bath in the early 1990s, he employed sixteen players including eleven internationals. These included Gareth Chilcott (security), Mike Catt (marketing), Chris Martin (computers), Steve Ojomoh (accountancy), Victor Ubogu (property) and Ben Clarke (farming). The players were not paid for playing, nor is there any suggestion that these jobs were simply bogus attempts to circumvent the amateur rules. However, they were the beneficiaries of a generous employer who would allow them to arrange their work schedule around their rugby commitments.<sup>87</sup> This certainly put them ahead of other clubs who were less willing or able to help their players:

I know the Gloucester boys were very jealous of the fact that the club didn't seem to want to do anything for players. A number of players did leave the club to try and seek some sort of financial package. Towards the end of the '80s I was looking to get out of teaching and I asked Gloucester to see if they could sort out any other line of work that I might be able to get in to. I knew this was going on at the time in other clubs and certainly at Bath they were looking to sort people out. I was politely told there was nothing on unless I wanted to work on a pig farm.

*Ruari Maclean*

It was the Five Nations Tournament that was the real selling point for rugby and therefore, the players who were playing at this level were the ones to press for a more relaxed stance on amateurism. In the 1980s, there was such a demand for tickets that Twickenham could have been filled several times over, but it was not until 1990 that rugby players were able to start to reap the rewards for their efforts. By this time, the demands on the players around the world had increased dramatically. The commitment they were expected to give to rugby meant that it was almost impossible to balance home and business lives, along with personal training, club training and squad sessions. The players had become what Chris Brasher has described as 'time professionals' that is, they were expected to devote as much time to their sport as they would their full time career.<sup>88</sup>

We had our first child in 1987. I was in the full squad then from about 1987 to 1992 when I packed up. I was very rarely here, I didn't really see my kids and of course they cannot remember that, but my wife does...I got promotion to Head of Department in 1989 and I simply could not put the energy I wanted into that. I remember feeling frustrated at the thought of my Department and clearly felt I wasn't really up to the job at that time. When I finished playing in 1992, a sudden improvement in my Head of Department role was clearly evident.

*Ruari Maclean*

In the Southern Hemisphere, a blind eye was turned to the activities of the players outside of rugby, a practice that was legitimised in 1990 by the IRB, who relaxed restrictions on players earning money outside rugby. This permitted players to seek financial rewards from communications (media and books) and also certain forms of commercial activities provided they were not "rugby related". Most unions interpreted this as meaning that players could appear in advertisements provided they were not in rugby kit. The RFU, however, was adamant that as the players were only in demand because of their status in rugby, all adverts would, therefore, be rugby related.<sup>89</sup> The stubbornness of the RFU led to a growing rift between the Committee and the players, with the latter attempting to push for equal parity with those from the Southern Hemisphere. The players however found that they were being re-buffed at every turn. When the players told Dudley Wood, the RFU Secretary, that as the IRB had sanctioned commercial activities there was nothing the RFU could do to prevent players from such commercial ventures, Wood replied "I think you will find that the RFU can do pretty much what it likes."<sup>90</sup> Still trying to work within the system, the England team set up a company called Playervision and engaged the services of an agent to help them develop commercially but, the RFU thwarted many of their projects. When the players started to ask for money from the media for interviews, the official line from Twickenham was that they were not allowed to accept money. The sum involved was really only a token, £500 to Playervision would have given



the BBC access to all the players for the Five Nations tournament. Similarly, Timberland wanted to use the England team to promote its products, and whilst no money was on offer, the players were to receive free clothes. However, Timberland were prevented from putting a photograph of the team wearing their clothes in the programme, as it was interpreted that this was rugby related (the Scottish Board permitted the Scotland team to appear in a similar photo in the match programme). This caused great resentment amongst the players and it resulted in strike action when the England team refused to attend a press interview or talk to the media at all after one match against Wales in 1991. At the end of another match during the same season, in which England won their final fixture of the Five Nations Championship and achieved the Grand Slam, the RFU showed the hypocrisy of their standpoint when the giant screens at Twickenham flashed up the message "Get Your England Grand Slam Merchandise."<sup>91</sup>

In readiness for the 1991 World Cup, the England squad players formulated a campaign that they christened "Run With Ball" through which they wished to co-operate with the RFU and combine their commercial interests with the promotion of the game. Once again, the RFU was very reluctant to sanction anything that would lead to the players making money. The RFU used a campaign in the press to attempt to undermine anything that Playervision tried to do, even though during meetings they appeared to support them. The campaign was very successful in so far as it did bring players into contact with children and so helped to popularise the sport. However, as a commercial venture, it was a disaster. The prolonged negotiations with the RFU meant that it was difficult to find sponsors, some of whom were put off by the apparent wrangling of the governing body. In the end, the players made just £2,000 each from the year's work.

Angered by the intransigence of the RFU, the players decided to move straight into commercial work and to keep the money themselves. With the regulations relating to such work being thrashed out, the players edged forward a step at a time. In a further attempt to undermine this development, the RFU used the media to portray the players as mercenaries and a potential danger to the entire sport of rugby. The RFU claimed that they were defending the concept of amateurism on behalf of the grass roots players, who wished the sport to retain its status quo. In 1993, Ian Beer the RFU President, talked of halting the "drift towards professionalism", he stated that any deals in which it was suspected that players were being paid, would be investigated and he warned clubs about giving players perks such as cars:

All clubs are being asked to sign a statement of compliance, that there are no illegal payments. If you induce players to join your club you are spending money that could maintain your stand. If a club pays more and more to players it will not stay in business.<sup>92</sup>

Playervision was never intended to provide a full-time employment salary for the players, but merely to provide a bonus to the players. It was shared equally between all players in the England squad and each member received about £7,000 a year. Over the years another tactic of the RFU in dealing with issues of professionalism, was to involve the players in time-consuming working parties ostensibly to obtain their views on the issues. Players would attend meetings that would seem to make progress, only to find that any agreements had to be ratified by the Amateur Status Committee. In turn, this had to be ratified by the Executive Committee and then by the full Committee. This meant that almost inevitably the regulations relating to amateurism remained in force and beyond the influence of the players. The relationship between the players and the committee members changed dramatically over this period. In previous decades, the committee



members had seen it as their right to offer a few tips to the players during training and just before international matches. But by the 1990s the players no longer had the same level of respect and they made it clear that such intrusions into their area of expertise were no longer welcome.<sup>93</sup> This exemplifies a shift in the balance of power; in the past the players had shown respect to committee members even though privately they may have resented their position. The refusal of the players to accept the sacking of their captain in 1995 for calling the committee a bunch of old farts, is an indication of how far the balance had shifted. The way the committee handled the entire affair showed how little they were aware of their diminishing authority over the players.

When the British Lions returned from New Zealand in 1993, they were in a militant mood because of the clear difference in attitudes and practices. They saw the All Black team appearing in numerous advertising campaigns and commercial and marketing activities, which the administrators in Britain were still denying to its players. The unfairness of the situation made the players more determined to level the playing field. The increasing commercialisation of rugby had pushed the 'voluntary' commitment of the players to its limit, yet at the same time the RFU refused to allow the participants to share in the available rewards. This meant that conflict between the players and administrators was almost inevitable. A point acknowledged by the Irish representative on the IRB, Ronnie Dawson in 1994:

I believe we have reached the point where we can demand no more of our top players. The demands on them are quite incredible. It is out of hand.<sup>94</sup>

He was wrong. The following year was a World Cup year and the players were expected to reach new heights of fitness and skill. The World Cup of 1995 was the last competition in which the players performed as amateurs. The final demise of amateur rugby union came as a result of the needs of television and the growing

competition between two TV moguls. In 1995, Kerry Packer and Rupert Murdoch were attempting to use Australian Rugby League as their major weapon in their battle to win the TV ratings war. Packer had effective control of the domestic game and, in an attempt to circumvent this, Murdoch was preparing to set up his own version, 'Super League'. This in itself was a danger to Union as Murdoch was preparing to lure Union stars to his new venture, with New Zealand one of the nations in greatest danger. Aware of the offers from Murdoch, the New Zealand Committee asked their players to give them some time to prepare an alternative offer. When they discovered the players would expect between \$NZ80,000 and \$NZ150,000 to remain All Blacks, it was clear that radical moves would have to be taken.<sup>95</sup> The predicament of the Unions was worsened when Rupert Murdoch was convinced that a Super League of the union code alongside the league code, would enable him to totally dominate in the media war. The 1995 World Cup provided an opportunity to develop a professional version of the sport. All the top players were together in the same country, which eased the logistical problems that had been faced by David Lord, Murdoch had the finances required and the players were ready to take action. When he started to examine the possibility of a competition that included Northern Hemisphere players, the IRB had two options, work with him or lose control of the sport.

#### **Amateur Rugby: An Example of Residual Hegemony**

The homogeneity of the players and administrators and the strict enforcement of the amateur principle meant that the sport remained in a relatively static state until the 1960s. Despite the greater 'professionalisation' of touring sides from the Southern Hemisphere (and humiliating defeats), the sport remained one in which the ideals of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century gentleman were upheld. From around



the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century it was the American model of sport that was the emergent hegemony and by the 1970s, this was the dominant form of sport and once more rugby was part of the residual hegemony. However, the traditions of rugby union were so strong that it was able to resist most challenges. It was as if rugby existed in a time zone divorced from the rest of sport. Increasingly, however, it was forced to acknowledge the reality of commercial pressures.

Since the early 1960s, rugby has been transformed from a British model of sport to the ascendant American model. Despite the resistance of the Old Guard, rugby has once again been incorporated into the dominant sports culture. Undoubtedly one of the major reasons for this was the growing internationalism of the sport after World War II and the desire for success in international competition. This in turn led to greater Government involvement in sport via the Sports Council and a financial impetus (and the need for accountability) in order for success to be achieved by amateur sports. There was a democratisation of the sport to the middle classes and hence a loss of elite values (this happened in the 1960s when many Old Boys' clubs were forced to go 'open' in order to survive). There developed a greater emphasis on winning and a shift from player centred laws to a spectator centred game which resulted in greater financial dependence and hence a need to produce a quality spectacle, which made incorporation inevitable.<sup>96</sup> The 1960s to the 1990s saw slow but steady erosion of all the amateur principles that had been defended for so long. Coaching at international level was introduced in 1968, followed by a National Cup (1972), Merit Tables (1976), National Leagues and World Cup (1987). The increasing importance of the fixtures led clubs to recruit and retain players and ensure they were available to play each Saturday:

I used to get flown down from Scotland every weekend to play for Wasps, which was very flattering. But that became a full time job in effect because I was spending 3½ days at University and flying down to London for weekends and flying back on Saturday or Sunday night.

Damien Hopley

This period saw an increase in *shamateurism*, as players received what was euphemistically termed ‘boot money’ as a reward for their loyalty and endeavours and some clubs went to extreme lengths to retain their players for Saturday. However, the RFU was still attempting to uphold this final concept of amateurism, but they were faced with opposition from all sides. Cultural changes meant that the sporting hegemony had changed and rugby was now the only major sport that prevented professionalism. The writer and playwright Colin Welland, who has been an ardent critic of what he perceives as the class bias of amateurism (he is also a life long supporter of rugby league), took the opportunity to criticise amateurism in the film *Chariots of Fire*. The plebeian attitude towards sport is exemplified in the film by Harold Abrahams (who had a professional coach to help him win an Olympic gold medal). When he is heavily criticised by the elderly upper class Dons at Cambridge, his response perhaps represents the attitudes of the 1980s:

You yearn for victory just as I do, but achieved with the apparent effortlessness of Gods. Yours are the archaic values of the prep-school playground. You deceive no-one but yourselves. I believe in the pursuit of excellence and I'll carry the future with me.<sup>97</sup>

The Southern Hemisphere nations had a far more democratic view of sport and were less concerned with notions of class distinctions. For them, professionalism was not a total anathema. Given that they were also the most powerful playing nations, their position on the International Board was very strong. There were also increasing commercial pressures from entrepreneurs who



saw an opportunity to establish professional rugby in the sports entertainment sector. The first of these attempts by David Lord in 1984 was unsuccessful, however, when media moguls, Kerry Packer and Rupert Murdoch became interested, with the power and finances that they had available, there was little option for the RFU. With seemingly everyone (clubs, players, Southern Hemisphere nations, the media and popular culture) apparently against the preservation of amateurism they had no power to resist the pressure for change. In 1995, rugby became an open sport, almost exactly 100 years after the Great Schism.

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## **CHAPTER 5**

# **THE PROFESSIONAL ERA**



The IRB announcement on the 27<sup>th</sup> August 1995, that Rugby Union was an 'open' sport, meant that to all intents and purposes the battle between those supporting amateur values and those proposing a professional sport was over. Payment for playing rugby, that had long been identified as the worse case scenario of professionalism, had become a reality. Bill Beaumont was one highly respected player who had believed that such a move would be detrimental to the sport:

I have always firmly believed that no one should ever receive any money for actually playing rugby. The game in that sense must remain strictly amateur. If players were ever to be paid for playing it would ruin the game itself and the whole structure of rugby in Britain.<sup>1</sup>

The important question that needs to be addressed within this chapter, is the extent to which the soothsayers were correct and whether the very fabric of rugby union would be ruined by payment for playing? Those involved in other sports would undoubtedly question such a supposition. Footballers have been paid for playing for over a century and there still remain a large number of people who play on Saturdays and Sundays, without any thought of payment. It could also be argued that even at the lowest level of the Sunday Leagues, there exist 'professional' attitudes that have been copied from the stars of the Premier League. These attitudes are not ones of hard work, dedication and the application of training and dietary principles, but rather the more brutalised attitudes of win at all costs, abuse of referees and opposition players, intimidation and fakery and the concept of the 'professional foul.' It was this approach to playing sport for recreation that made those who upheld the amateur principles fearful. They defended amateurism not just to restrict the financial hopes of the few, but to protect the harmonious enjoyment of the many.

It could be argued that most people connected with the sport had little idea how much rugby would change as an open sport. The prevailing view in Britain was that rugby would continue very much as before, but with elite players earning enough to play full time, with a few others being paid as part-time players. At the height of 'shamateurism' in 1994, Michael Mince suggested in *The Guardian* that all the fuss about whether or not international players were *de facto* professionals mattered little to most rugby players:

Nobody gives a dam if the Will Carlings and Jerry Guscotts cream it off the top. The rest will turn out for the Extra Bs, with a glass or three of orange juice to follow.<sup>2</sup>

This assumes that when a sport becomes professional only the players at the top will be affected. The reality is that the structure of any sport is dictated by events at the pinnacle of the playing pyramid and that decisions taken regarding the way rugby is played and administered at international level, will inevitably permeate down to the lower teams. Rugby failed to heed the lessons from athletics, where most of the income was creamed off to pay a few fortunate performers huge salaries and in tennis where the grass roots level is still unable to produce sufficient good players to compete at the highest level. It could be argued that neither of these sports has really come to terms with the professional era and in many ways, they still exist as amateur sports but with paid performers. With so many of the RFU hierarchy declaring on numerous occasions that rugby must remain amateur, it would have seemed inevitable that when the IRB announced that the game was to become professional, they would resign *en masse*. None of them did so, in fact only one person connected with the higher echelons of the sport, from Leicester Tigers, resigned on this issue.<sup>3</sup> This may indicate that they too had accepted that the laws relating to amateurism were unworkable, and that



they wished to remain to assist with the changeover. An uncharitable view is that they wanted to cling to power regardless of the overriding philosophy of the sport. Analysing the changes that took place within rugby will encompass power and politics, finances, the clubs and players as well as the way that rugby is played as a professional sport.

### **Power & Politics**

The Southern Hemisphere powers were prepared for professional rugby and for the clubs, players and administrators, the changeover appeared to be relatively seamless and painless. In Britain, however, the decision took the RFU very much by surprise and their inability to react had consequences that affected rugby for a number of years. This is a point conceded by the RFU Secretary:

The RFU was hardly geared up even to contemplate, still less execute the whole world of professionalism. It was a defiant union as far as the advance of professionalism in the game was concerned and it felt the best thing to do was shut the door, bolt the hatches and hope it would all go away.<sup>4</sup>

New Zealand, Australia and South Africa had responded immediately by signing their leading players on contracts and so ensuring that they had first call on their services. The response of the RFU to professional rugby was to declare a moratorium for one season, in effect, declaring that rugby should remain amateur and that the players and clubs should continue as before, until the RFU decided the best way forward. Whether this was due to naiveté or arrogance, hindsight has shown that it was certainly sheer folly. Although there was no real reason to suggest that the clubs could afford to employ players on high salaries, all those players who were integral to their countries playing power were effectively free agents and were now available, for the first time, in a free market economy. If the RFU and the other Home Nations were slow to respond, there were those who saw an opportunity to develop professional rugby clubs. Within weeks, the

moratorium had been broken and the leading players signed long-term contracts thus pledging their loyalty to their employers rather than their country.

The first five years of the professional era saw a series of conflicts between different factions over who was to control rugby union as a professional sport. These conflicts revealed clearly the underlying tensions within the sport, as just over a century of relative peace and harmony was replaced by turmoil and recriminations. When the RFU had previously faced a serious challenge to its authority in 1893, it had been able to use the support of the traditional amateur clubs to defeat those clubs who wished to access potential rewards. There is little doubt, that the disputes at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were also about money but, would the same power source be available to the RFU on this occasion and even if it were available, would it prove to be sufficient? The disputes that took place revealed the true power source in rugby union. It is worth looking in detail at the events of the first twelve months of professionalism, as the political manoeuvrings of the different factions undoubtedly set the tone for the future.

The first and to some extent, the most pervading of the threats to the authority of the RFU, came from the leading clubs in England, many of whom had accepted (and largely welcomed) the involvement of wealthy benefactors. For the most part these millionaires had become involved in rugby only when it became an open sport. It could be argued, that as successful businessmen they regarded rugby as they would any other commodity and saw an opportunity for profit and gain, prestige and power in a major sport. Ashley Levett who invested heavily in Richmond emphasised this point:

Clubs that don't have benefactors won't survive...the initial entry price in rugby is very small compared with other sports.<sup>5</sup>



It could also be argued that some of these individuals were more akin to philanthropists, for whom professional rugby presented an opportunity to develop success at their local club. Sir John Hall, who was one of the first of these benefactors, clearly saw himself as belonging to the latter group:

I like to be referred to as a capitalist with a social conscience, in the North-East we all come from Methodist or working class backgrounds. That never leaves you. I've made enough money. Now I want to see the North-East prosper.<sup>6</sup>

Regardless of their initial motives, most financial backers had withdrawn their support within a few years and generally left the clubs in precarious financial positions. On 7<sup>th</sup> November 1995, the leading clubs formed English First Division Rugby Ltd (EFDR) and demanded an annual income of £1 million per club from the RFU. By itself, this may have been dismissed as an empty demand, however, they also announced that the players were contracted to them and therefore, the RFU could not assume they would have access to the players for international matches. The timing of this announcement was undoubtedly calculated, as it came just one day before the RFU issued a 52-page report, 'The Right To Decide', which amongst other recommendations, suggested that as the RFU would be providing the bulk of the income, it should have primacy over the players.

The parallels between the issue of professional rugby at the end of each century are uncanny. In 1995, the RFU adopted the reverse of its role a century earlier and seemed to be moving towards a position where they would agree to support the professional clubs, an indication that preserving authority had taken preference over defending amateurism. This alarmed the vast majority of the other clubs who believed that the revenue generated by the sport should serve the interests of all clubs not just the elite. Their opportunity to regain some sense of control came with the untimely death of the Chairman of the RFU Executive,

Peter Bromley. The remaining members of the Executive were unanimous in their support of John Jeavons-Fellows as his replacement, but Cliff Brittle had the overwhelming support of the traditionalists. His victory at a Special General Meeting in January 1995 (by 647 votes to 332) and the support he garnered to hold a further Special Meeting to debate the RFU's embracing of professionalism, confused the issue even further. The situation was that the leading clubs wanted professionalism and the largest share of the revenue and needed to structure the season to enable professional rugby to flourish. A large section of the rest of the clubs were uncertain whether they wanted professionalism at all and certainly were against the concept of the RFU running rugby, based on the interests of a small minority of clubs. The RFU Executive was in favour of professionalism and preferred to reach agreement with leading clubs rather than risk another schism. This happened despite the clearly expressed will of the majority of RFU members, who had given the Chairman of that Executive a mandate to "keep a major part of the game non-vocational while accepting the inevitability of commercial rugby."<sup>7</sup>

The RFU had changed in a few short months from being the defenders of amateurism to the proponents of professionalism. It is unlikely that they had undergone something akin to a religious conversion, nor that the threats of legal action from Sir John Hall were the major cause of this U-turn. Hall who was challenging through the courts, the authority of the RFU to negotiate the television rights to club matches, clearly had little regard for the traditional authority of the RFU:

The unions are trying to stifle us, but as long as we stick together, stay strong and get the rights we're entitled to, we'll win through. What you're seeing from the RFU is the last gyrations of a dying dinosaur.<sup>8</sup>



It was fiscal necessity that was the underlying cause of the willingness of the RFU to concede some authority to men who had no history of involvement in the sport and who had, at best, narrowly defined areas of interest. The commercialisation of rugby since the 1960s had led to a situation where the redevelopment of Twickenham was financed by a £35 million loan, the servicing of which cost around £3 million a year. With rugby as an amateur sport, the RFU was able to control all the revenue and ensure this money was available. The threat that came with rugby as a professional sport, was that of a breakaway from the RFU by the leading clubs who would then form their own league and cup competitions and even their own international team. The elite players were, on the whole, contracted to these clubs and expressed quite clearly where their loyalties lay during a meeting in April 1996 and by boycotting an England training session in September 1996. The authority that came from the support of the majority of clubs, (so long the power base of the RFU), was no longer sufficient. Whereas in the 1960s and 1970s the RFU could have forced the leading clubs to fall in line secure in the knowledge that they held the key to the players loyalty, in the professional era the players were legally contracted to the clubs. The period since 1995 has seen the RFU attempting to retain control of the sport over which they had almost unquestioned authority from 1895.

Brittle was seen as something of a reactionary, in that he was anxious to retain the authority of the RFU over all the clubs and to carefully control the developments of professional rugby. His presence was clearly seen as a problem to some members of the committee who took to holding secret meetings in London hotels. When Brittle gatecrashed one such meeting (with the help of a

national newspaper), it was clear that there was a power struggle within the RFU itself:

This was a secret meeting concealed from me by some of the cabal who are working against me. It is precisely what I am fighting against.<sup>9</sup>

Brittle was adopting a stance against professionalism that had been the traditional perspective of the RFU for decades and had the support of the smaller clubs. This position failed to take account of the reality of the situation. The RFU needed the revenue from television to finance the infrastructure essential for a modern sport and it was the potential income available through satellite television that was central to any developments. The RFU needed the top players and clubs as part of a package that would attract Sky Television. If they did not make concessions to the top clubs, there was a very real threat that they would deal with television companies on their own and form a 'Packer style' breakaway organisation. ITV had indicated to the English Professional Rugby Union Clubs that they would be willing to pay in excess of £50 million over three years, for a three nations tournament featuring England, Wales and France. Consequently this left the RFU rather powerless.<sup>10</sup> The England squad had effectively gone on strike and without the leading clubs and players, it was unlikely that Sky Television would deal with the RFU. In order to retain control of rugby, the RFU was forced to agree to underwrite a large proportion of the leading clubs' wage bills from the TV revenue. This, in turn, required the pacification of the smaller clubs in order to prevent the democratic process available to them, from forcing a fresh schism. There is little wonder given these circumstances that the first five years of professional rugby union involved a number of disputes and stand-offs, boycotts and bankruptcy amongst some clubs.



In 1997, the attitude of Tony Hallett the RFU Secretary, was illustrative of those who believed that the professional clubs needed some form of autonomy in order to enable them to develop their long-term future:

The clubs must be allowed to manage their affairs in such particulars as a business, which they all are now.<sup>11</sup>

The difficulty with such a suggestion is that the RFU was a democratic organisation. As such it would be difficult to enable a small group of 24 clubs to dictate to the 2,000 or so lesser clubs how the Union should be run and, more importantly, how the income should be administered. Similarly, it may be seen as unrealistic for the minor clubs to determine how the professional clubs should run their businesses. Much the same problem had been faced by the Football League, when the First Division clubs became frustrated that their opportunities to secure income were diluted by the need to share this money with clubs from the lower divisions. The result in this case, was the formation of a Premier League, which was able to negotiate its own television and sponsorship deals, a development that had not gone unnoticed by the owners of the professional rugby clubs. The RFU had been established to serve the interests of the clubs and had responsibility for the national teams. The dispute within the RFU revolved around which group had primacy - the national teams, the leading clubs or the majority of lesser clubs? With the RFU itself disunited, there was ample opportunity for other groups to gain some control over the governance of the sport.

There was also little unity from those groups outside the RFU. Although the English Professional Rugby Union Clubs (EPRUC) was supposed to represent the interests of the 24 leading clubs, it was dominated by eight owners from the First Division clubs and at times the lesser clubs in EPRUC found themselves outside the decision making process.<sup>12</sup> Therefore the same people dominated the

English Rugby Partnership (ERP), which was a joint venture between the RFU and EPRUC that gave each a fifty percent sharehold in the running of the top two divisions. This was a clear indication that the RFU had relinquished total authority over the top level of the sport. It could be argued that this recognised the need for some clubs to run themselves as a business and with an equal share in the venture, the RFU was at least able to influence, if not control developments. The threat always remained that a handful of clubs, who had the leading players under long-term contract, could withdraw at any time and set up a rival organisation. It was certainly the aim of the major owners that they should be able to control the European Cup and in order to facilitate this, they had suggested that the Five Nations matches should be moved to the end of the season. When they were unable to get their way, they demonstrated their power. The Leicester Agreement between the RFU and EPRUC in 1996 had been designed to establish the central importance of international rugby, with players released by clubs for international tours during the close season without a fee. However, it was not difficult to “persuade” players that their best interests lay in allowing injuries and tired bodies to heal during the close season. Thus, England toured Australia, New Zealand and South Africa in 1998 without most of their leading players and was heavily defeated in each international. The three Southern Hemisphere nations were quick to issue veiled threats that if such an event recurred, it would threaten future fixtures involving England. This would have been a potential disaster given the lucrative nature of such fixtures. In a further show of strength, the English Clubs withdrew from the European Cup for the 1998/99 season, thus devaluing the tournament and causing consternation from the sponsors and the television companies. It was not difficult for the clubs to demonstrate who had the power in



the partnership, but it was a reaction born of desperation. Even those clubs with generous benefactors were reliant on income from television and sponsorship, as there were still insufficient spectators to maintain the levels of income the clubs required. Facing an uncertain financial future, they needed to use their contractual control of the players as a bargaining tool to develop a sound economic base for a long-term future. Unless they could secure control of rugby or at least become powerful enough to dictate terms to the RFU, few of them would survive. The Mayfair Agreement was designed to be a tripartite agreement between the RFU, the clubs and the players, which involved restricting the number of matches players would take part in, thus ensuring that they were fresh enough to perform at the highest level. However, as some leading clubs refused to sign the agreement, it was rendered rather meaningless.

The struggle between the factions for control of rugby continued season after season. The establishment of a Management Board of twelve (including representatives from ERP), at least streamlined the decision-making process and the day to day running of the sport. The Reform Group led by Fran Cotton and Bill Beaumont had come to the fore initially as the champion of the traditionalists. They argued in favour of the primacy of international rugby and the need to reduce the influence of the top clubs. The presence on the Management Board of these two former England captains, suggested that a common goal was required and attempts needed to be made to find a means to enable the England team to flourish and the major clubs to become solvent. As Cotton put it:

The Rugby Union must govern the game in England and must have the powers to be able to do that...Within that we must allow those clubs to develop their interests and encourage and work with them...The top clubs get the money for the competitions they're in, in my view quite rightly because they generate the income and they need to fund professional rugby.<sup>13</sup>

Towards the end of the 1999/2000 season, there were signs that after five years of fudging the issue and attempting to fit a professional structure around a model that had been appropriate for amateur rugby, the RFU was conceding that only radical changes would enable professional rugby to flourish. The 'Andrew Plan' was recognised as a legitimate development, with a franchise framework to encompass both domestic and European club competitions. The structured season this outlined in the proposal would also enable the release of players for the lucrative international matches. The major clubs accepted this as an opportunity to develop a professional sport at club level, with guarantees of up to £2.1 million per club, per year, from the RFU. The possibility of a schism had been avoided and the RFU secured the release of players for the International season and the majority of other clubs could carry on with their existing formats. On paper, at least, there seemed a possibility to make progress.

The problematical monetary affairs of the RFU led to a further split within the RFU, as well as the home unions. The need to maximise TV revenue resulted in the RFU negotiating a separate deal with Sky Television for the broadcasting of international matches from Twickenham. The decision to accept an £87.5 million offer to replace the £27 million deal with the BBC was good business, particularly as £22.5 million of this was for the senior clubs. It was, however, unpalatable to those within the RFU who regarded television more as a means of marketing the sport and providing a service for the supporters. Their concerns that a satellite company may not service these needs appeared well founded. Viewing figures fell from an average of six million with the BBC, to less than one million for international matches and 250,000 for club matches.<sup>14</sup> To compound the problem, this was a deal that ended a tradition of mutual support within the home



unions. Tom Kiernan, Chairman of the Five Nations Committee, was instrumental in the resolution to expel England from the Five Nations Championship:

This decision by England is the worst day of my rugby life. The championship is part of what the four home nations have created. The RFU have no right to sell it independently. I have no doubt that the RFU, by their actions have expelled themselves from the championship.<sup>15</sup>

Tony Hallett, who was the Secretary of the RFU at the time, felt that this was a bluff by the other home nations and that they would quickly realise that England's participation was essential for the survival of the Five Nations Championship. Without England, the Five Nations (Italy to replace England) would not be a meaningful competition and less attractive to the TV companies.<sup>16</sup> The combination of historical authority, financial superiority and playing strength should have established England as very much the senior partner of the Northern Hemisphere. However, the RFU was under severe pressure to secure the place of England in the Five Nations Championship. On the 4<sup>th</sup> September 1996, only one player turned up for an England training session, the others had heeded the warnings of the clubs and their employers. A ballot was held by EPRUC on the 11<sup>th</sup> October 1996, when the twenty-four member clubs were advised to withdraw from the RFU. It was essential, if these clubs and their players were to remain under the authority of the RFU, that some finances were made available to them. On the 6<sup>th</sup> September 1996, the RFU climbed down and agreed to share the proceeds from the Sky deal with the other members of the Five Nations. The deal that was reached at least provided a short-term solution to their problems. However, the RFU was relinquishing £50 million over five years, which was an income that it badly needed both to service existing debts and to develop both the elite and grass roots of the sport. The loss of this income had a devastating effect

on those clubs who had taken the gamble to turn fully professional. Without the level of support they needed from the RFU, only a handful could survive and then only through the generosity of their financial backers. It is perhaps an indication of the close-knit relationship between the members of the various committees, with old school camaraderie getting in the way of the realistic business deals which were essential if professional rugby was to flourish. An indication of the extent of the RFU's climb-down, is that they further agreed to allow the Five Nations Committee to have the rights to any TV deals for the next ten years. When England were perceived as rather slow in ratifying this agreement, they were once again expelled from the Five Nations Championship in January 1999. Where they had once provided leadership and authority, those they had always regarded as the junior partners were now keeping the RFU in check. Having capitulated once, the RFU again fell in line and used the old boys' network to resolve the dispute. A peace summit was held in Glasgow between Allan Hosie, Chairman of the Five Nations Committee, Brian Baister, the Rugby Football Union Chairman, and Bill Beaumont, RFU negotiator and former England captain. The three men met in a Glasgow pub, the Drum and Monkey and a couple of hours later the war of words and wounded pride was over. The Five Nations committee insisted that only by actually expelling England did the RFU come to heel.<sup>17</sup>

### Clubs

Commercialisation is one of the dominant trends of late 20th Century sport and one of the ramifications of the relatively late conversion of rugby to a fully professional sport was that the expectations of the players were heavily influenced by the wages of those in other sports. Performers who in previous decades would have been able to earn only a reasonable living at their sport had, by the 1990s



become multi-millionaires. The top sports earner of 1996 was Mike Tyson, with an income of \$75 million and the power of television and sponsorship can inflate the wages of performers who endorse products during and beyond their peak playing days. Arnold Palmer, who rarely plays golf competitively any more, still earned \$15.1 million from endorsements in 1996.<sup>18</sup> An examination of the top team sport earners at the time when rugby players were starting to negotiate their contracts with the clubs shows just how much some performers were earning and perhaps inflated the expectations of the elite players (see Appendix 8). The situation was exacerbated by Sir John Hall, who completely changed the starting figure for negotiations when he signed Rob Andrew for a reported salary of around £250,000 per annum. Rugby players began to place a high value on their services. A value that was in many cases far more than clubs could reasonably be expected to afford.

However, once one club had started this process, others felt obliged to follow:

I know there was a sense that it was a ‘fill your boots’ time in the sport because a lot of people were throwing money at it. I know for example, one director of rugby who was paid six figures a year, the club then turned round and offered him about 40% of that and he said “Yes, absolutely”. So from that point of view there were a lot of people just out to milk it for as much as they could.

*Damian Hopley*

Whether there is room in the commercial sporting world for rugby union is yet to be decided but certainly in 1995/96, there was insufficient finance available to support the number of players demanding inflated salaries. It was partly the determination of the players to negotiate high wages that almost crippled the sport. It quickly became clear that for most players, the multi-millionaire superstar lifestyle was unlikely to be a reality and clubs were forced to re-think their strategies. In February 1997, the players at Llanelli voted to take a pay cut in order to prevent the club becoming bankrupt and at the end of June 1997, Harlequins reported a loss of £500,000 for the year.<sup>19</sup> The accountants Deloitte & Touche,

estimated in 1998 that the professional clubs were operating at a financial loss of at least £1.8 million per club.<sup>20</sup> In the season ending 1998/99, the RFU showed a loss of £608,000 from a turnover of £35 million. Even this was seen as something of a success given the £10 million losses over the previous two seasons.<sup>21</sup> It became evident that rugby could not sustain so many professional players and that economic realities would force many to revert to amateurism. Even with mergers and ground sales, clubs could not survive for long without a regular income from a reliable source. Two well-established clubs in Leeds: Headingley and Roundhay, merged to form Leeds RUFC. They sold one ground, then the other and used the money to finance professional rugby as Leeds Tykes. The club later merged with the Rugby League side, Leeds Rhinos. The reality is, that while the Rhinos attract average crowds of 13,000 and can therefore support professional rugby, Leeds Tykes attracts crowds of only 800.

It was not until five years after the introduction of professional rugby, that a club was able to operate at a profit. At the end of the 1999/2000 season, Leicester Tigers had a surplus income of £560,000 based on a turnover of £5 million. The fact that this was attributed not only to an increase in sponsorship and commercial activities, but also to a more “professional” business set-up which reduced costs, indicated that the development from amateur club to professional club was a complex issue.<sup>22</sup> The clubs in Wales who had reputedly been paying their players generous expenses for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, found that full-time professionalism was beyond their means. The level of support and the community spirit of the Welsh clubs had enabled them to employ their players as virtually part-time professionals. The level of remuneration expected by top players in the professional era could only be sustained by significant funding from the Welsh



RFU. The small town clubs were hit hard and large clubs Swansea and Cardiff both withdrew from the Welsh Leagues, in order to pursue potentially more lucrative fixtures with English clubs. Although both returned to the fold after one season, the more parochial nature of Welsh club rugby would suggest that they would be able to support only a very small number of professional clubs. The situation is similar in Scotland, where the initial experiment with Provinces and then Super-Clubs, suggests that some form of British or European League is likely to be the only solution to resolving their difficulties in finding sufficiently meaningful and profitable fixtures.

There can be little doubt that the professional era has had a major impact on the clubs at all playing levels. It has been a traumatic experience for many clubs at the highest levels. Some former elite clubs have confirmed their positions, whilst others have struggled to maintain their position and a few have gone into almost terminal decline. It has also presented the opportunity for a few of the less fashionable clubs to claim their place amongst the new order. Even at the lower end of the leagues, there have been clubs who have seized the opportunity to achieve a higher status in the sport by offering payment to players and therefore, gaining an advantage over their rivals. An examination of the top two leagues at the end of the amateur era and the start of the 2000 season, indicates some of these changes. One of the more obvious differences between 1995 and 2000 is that of name changes. These have been instigated for commercial reasons; in order to identify with a sponsor or a region or simply as an attempt to make a traditional rugby club sound more upbeat.

TOP TWO DIVISIONS 1995 & 2000

<u>DIVISION 1 /PREMIER/</u>		<u>DIVISION 2 /DIVISION 1/</u>	
<u>1995</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>1995</u>	<u>2000</u>
BATH	BATH	COVENTRY	COVENTRY
BRISTOL	BRISTOL	FYLDE	BIRMINGHAM
			SOLIHULL
GLOUCESTER	GLOUCESTER	LONDON IRISH	LONDON WELSH
HARLEQUINS	NEC HARLEQUINS	LONDON SCOTTISH	EXETER
LEICESTER TIGERS	LEICESTER TIGERS	MOSELEY	MOSELEY-
NORTHAMPTON	NORTHAMPTON	NEWCASTLE	OTLEY
	SAINTS	GOSFORTH	
ORRELL	SARACENS	NOTTINGHAM	LEEDS
SALE	MANCHESTER SALE	SARACENS	WORCESTER
WASPS	LONDON WASPS	WAKEFIELD	MANCHESTER
WEST HARTLEPOOL	LONDON IRISH	WATERLOO	WATERLOO
	ROTHERHAM		BEDFORD
	NEWCASTLE		HENLEY
	FALCONS		

The traditional giants of the English game have had mixed fortunes in the last five years. Gloucester, Wasps, Harlequins, Bath, Leicester and Bristol are still in the top division, but the intervening five years have seen relegation and promotion for Gloucester and Bristol and acrimonious sackings of coaches for all of these clubs. The most “professional” club of the amateur era was Bath, yet they appeared to find the transformation to a fully professional club quite traumatic (as witnessed by the BBC documentary “The Rugby Club”) and although they have had success in Europe, they have yet to regain their former reputation. Leicester Tigers, however, seemed to have been able to mix their traditional sense of a rugby family, with international imports and have been consistent achievers over the last five years. Other former leading clubs have not fared so well. Richmond quickly embraced the concept of professionalism and with the support of a benefactor in the form of Ashley Levett, recruited a host of top players and seemed destined to make an impact amongst the elite. However, when Levett became frustrated at the lack of progress with the RFU, he withdrew his support. With London Scottish



(with whom they had shared a ground) in a similar position (going into voluntary liquidation with debts of more than £2 million), both clubs were forced to merge with London Irish in 1999 to form a London “super club”. This was a development that delighted the EFDR as it reduced the number of clubs in the top division from fourteen to twelve. Nevertheless the financial benefits to the professional game have to be balanced against the drastic effects professional rugby has had on these three clubs. Richmond (formed in 1861) had provided a high level of rugby for the local population and London Scottish (1878) together with London Welsh and London Irish, had further acted as a meeting place for exiles living in London. All the years of effort and hard work that had gone into developing these clubs, was overtaken by their approach to the professional era. Although on paper London Irish has survived and may even flourish in the future, only the name retains their links with the past. The notion of Irishness, which made the club unique, has disappeared because players from all over the world are now part of the new set-up. London is only a historical link, as the club is now based in Reading.

Other clubs who were considered to be Senior Clubs in amateur rugby, found the ruthlessness of the rugby business a costly enterprise (in more senses than one). When Sir John Hall effectively raised the stakes overnight at Newcastle, other clubs clearly believed that they needed to match him in the recruitment of players. Moseley, Coventry and Bedford all invested heavily in bringing in new players and in their eagerness to recruit, were paying fairly ordinary players between £60,000 and £100,000 per year:

They [Moseley] were ill equipped to handle it. At the time I was putting together the first contracts with players, I knew what the budgets were, about £250,000 which was about the commercial income for the club and was what we felt we could afford, about £50 to £100 per game, pretty modest really. Then the club decided the way forward was to put together a consortium to run the club. It was a disaster the way they handled it. They then brought in a number of players who

they paid ridiculous sums to and bankrupted the club in eighteen months. They were businessmen who, when it came to rugby, couldn't do their sums. One hundred and twenty five years of history went down the tubes in eighteen months. It was misplaced ambitions.

*Barry Corless*

In order to finance this, they were effectively selling the family silver in the hope that, by retaining their place amongst the elite, they would be able to share in the potential rewards later. It was almost inevitable that in such a scenario there would be a Darwinist outcome and these three clubs found they were not amongst the fittest. Players had their contracts cancelled and club grounds were sold to pay off the debts. Although these clubs are still, in theory, towards the top of the rugby pyramid, the reality is that they have been forced to revert to an amateur or part-time approach. Moseley, now play their home matches at a local university, having sold the Reddings to settle their debts:

I think the big disappointment, without any shadow of a doubt, was the failure of the Rugby Union to grasp the professional issue. The consequences of their failure has been catastrophic for many, many clubs...There was no need for what happened at Moseley to have happened at all. That was crass, bad management and poor team performance.

*John White*

There are those clubs for whom the professional era has been an opportunity to gain a place at the very top of English club rugby. In the amateur era, these clubs may have been making slow progress up the league pyramid, but were unable to attract the top players because of their location, lack of facilities, lack of linked employment opportunities or simply because they were unfashionable. Saracens and Newcastle Falcons were two clubs who, although on the fringes of success, were unable to make the breakthrough as amateur clubs. Their potential was only realised with the support of wealthy benefactors, together with astute recruitment and links with the community. In both cases, it was not just the cash provided by Nigel Wray and Sir John Hall respectively that encouraged success, it



was the appointment of a figurehead on the playing/coaching side that was crucial. At Newcastle, the presence of the highly successful England and British Lions fly half Rob Andrew indicated the seriousness of their ambitions and despite their initial position as a second division side, they had little problem recruiting players of the highest calibre. At Saracens, the catalyst for success was the arrival of the South African World Cup captain Francois Pienaar. Although two other high profile players in Philippe Sella and Michael Lynagh had preceded him to the club, it was Pienaar's insistence on the development of the professional approach to rugby that led to Saracens success:

I turned up at the Saracens training ground prepared for conditions to be primitive and more in keeping with rugby's amateur era, but they were far worse than I had ever imagined... Nigel Wray's vision was that Saracens should become more than just a winning rugby team: he wanted the club to become a brand... We wanted to be professional in every respect, to aspire to the highest standards possible.<sup>23</sup>

Skilful marketing which included the fans wearing fezzes, a ground sharing scheme with Watford FC and the development of local talent to link with overseas players, has probably made Saracens the epitome of a modern professional club. Another success story of this period has been that of Rotherham, who had started in the leagues at level 8 and who achieved Division 4 status by 1995. They gained promotion to the Premier Division at the end of the 1999/2000 season, a status achieved without the presence of a wealthy benefactor and without any star names. Although they may find life among the big spenders and international squads difficult, they have already achieved far more than anyone could have predicted. It is undoubtedly a feature of full professionalism that the eager and hungry clubs will survive and those who have been successful in the past but who may have been guilty of resting on their laurels, have declined more rapidly than would otherwise have been the case.

As an amateur sport rugby inspired a sense of belonging and loyalty between the clubs and the players. Team spirit was regarded highly and players often remained in the first team of a club beyond their time. This was partly because without the necessity to win matches, it was a luxury clubs could afford in order to maintain the 'family' spirit. There was also the problem that for some clubs, it was rather a matter of chance whether they could find an adequate replacement. Apart from re-location because of work, there was usually little incentive for players to move clubs:

There was no real thought of moving to a bigger club. We didn't think of Moseley as really any bigger. It just wasn't the done thing to leave. It was only after Whiteman left to go to Moseley, then Coventry and went on to play for England that it was considered acceptable. By that time [early 1960s], they [Moseley] were starting to become a bigger club.

*Ken Birrell*

The sense of loyalty and continuity remained a feature of rugby right up to 1995, with relatively little movement of players between the senior clubs (as opposed to players moving up to a larger club). This aspect of rugby diminished from 1995, as almost immediately clubs were able to attract players based on remuneration levels and signing-on bonus. Inevitably, it was the high spending clubs such as Newcastle and Richmond who were the major recruiters, but others were soon forced to follow suit. Clubs were now free to build their squads, restrained only by financial actualities. It was the players who were largely the pawns, particularly with the clubs able to recruit worldwide. Past records and contributions counted for little as players were replaced if more suitable replacements could be found. Richard Cockerill was a player who quickly came to recognise how rugby had changed:

They [Leicester Tigers] want the best players and if you're not doing it for them, they'll get rid of you. Players like Rory Underwood, John Liley, Jez Harris, Steve



Hackney, Aadel Kardooni and Niall Malone have all departed. These guys were the mainstay of the club when it was amateur.<sup>24</sup>

Cockerill's own loyalty to the club he had joined in 1992 was tested in the summer of 1997. His first professional contract from Leicester was £22,000 plus £250 match fees and a £250 win bonus which meant he earned £42,000 that season. However he was prepared to leave Leicester when they were not able to offer him enough money. Northampton was prepared to offer a slightly higher wage, plus a £50,000 signing on bonus. As an amateur he would have stayed but, as a professional, he had to be realistic and maximise his limited time span as a player. Nevertheless, some of the old amateur loyalty remained and he eventually accepted a slightly higher annual salary with Leicester and sacrificed the potential signing on bonus to remain with his team-mates.

It is not only at the top level that clubs have been affected by professionalism and in terms of the long-term future of the sport, the consequences may be far reaching. One of the reasons that rugby was successful as a sport for so long was that it made maximum use of voluntarism. From the chairman of the club through to the treasurer, secretary, coach and tea lady, everyone contributed their time and skill for the satisfaction of being part of a team. With the introduction of professional players, coaches and administrators, those who had previously given of themselves freely, were becoming reluctant to continue in the same vein and it has proven very difficult to mix paid employees and volunteers within the club format. At the top level, this simply became an extra expense to be budgeted for, but at the lower levels, the cost has been far higher. Cliff Brittle was one of those to recognise that the loss of unpaid administrators was a severe blow to grass roots rugby.<sup>25</sup> Without back-up support, teams could not be organised and gradually

players, unable to get regular games, would either move to other clubs or give up the sport altogether:

I think professionalism has made clubs pare down the number of sides that they run. They are only running a first team or a first team squad and the development squad that brings young players through to their first team. What happened to all the other six teams that clubs used to put out? So where are the facilities for people who wanted to play the game? Two clubs merge, each club runs six teams, what happens when they merge, they're running three teams, what happened to the rest?  
*Bernard White*

An example of this development is Streatham and Croydon RFC, who were running only two sides in 1999, compared to thirteen in the amateur period.<sup>26</sup> Figures from the compulsory RFU insurance confirm this trend, with a reduction of 664 teams during the period 1998-2000. With each team estimated to require 40 players to sustain the team over the season, this equates to around 25,000 players lost to the sport; a figure likely to be increased significantly if the number of administrators and officials, who have also departed, is taken into account. The Blackman Report, commissioned by the RFU, proposed not only £605,000 be allocated to introduce initiatives to attract and retain players, but also that a change of philosophy was needed with less emphasis being placed on the club 1<sup>st</sup> XV. Others however have attributed the blame for this onto the RFU and their devotion to the elite clubs:

We are constantly kicked in the teeth by incompetent people at the RFU who have sold us down the river. All they see is Division One and it's crazy.<sup>27</sup>

Some of the clubs at the lower end have attempted a scaled down version of the professional club model and have paid coaches, as well as offering payments of between £20 and £100 per week to attract players who may be able to bring the club some modest success. It is unlikely that such an investment could ever be successful, given both the incapability of most clubs to bring in any gate-money and the rather paltry sums available from sponsors and the RFU at the lower



levels. It is more likely to be a sense of civic pride in the club and a desire to see their club become successful locally, that is the driving force. It is difficult to see how such initiatives can be sustained. At present, the framework of club rugby almost encourages clubs to be ambitious beyond their means. The pyramid structure, which was introduced with the leagues in 1987, had the democratic and laudable attribute of making rugby seamless in that, for the first time, status was to be earned on the playing field. For those clubs such as Henley, Worcester and Rotherham who have risen through the ranks, the pyramid scheme has been a success, but, there are other clubs such as Barker Butts and Lichfield who have initially risen, only to fall further down the leagues as they failed to sustain their impetus. To be a successful professional club however, requires far more than just ambition and drive. There must be financial backing, a solid infrastructure and a spectator base to ensure a long-term future. This has long been the paradigm in the USA, where a franchise is only granted to a club that can produce a viable business plan. This concept also forms part of the Andrew Plan, with a stadium being a pre-requisite part of any Premier League franchise. It is unlikely that fully professional rugby can be maintained beyond a handful of top clubs but the laws governing the sport which include player registration, contracts, the number of replacements and officials are constant throughout the sport. Changes to the structure of rugby would have to be introduced to acknowledge the different approaches to the sport. The need to prevent junior clubs from becoming obsessed with professionalism was a point addressed by Fran Cotton:

I talk to Chairmen of small clubs who spend their time running car boot sales to pay the players – I think that's a complete nonsense. We've got to reverse the culture. I'm not talking about amateurism, I'm talking about going back to those values that made the game what it is. I think we've polluted it by chucking a load of money at it.<sup>28</sup>

## Players

Maguire argues that sports performers have rarely had much control over their training and playing because of the power relations between coaches, managers, organisers and performers. The commercialisation process can change this relationship and force the player into performing on demand, almost like a circus animal. The greater the commercial interest in terms of the entertainment value of the sport, the greater the pressure to perform.<sup>29</sup> A Marxist perspective suggests that once players become professional they lose control over their means of production, in much the same way as sex between consenting adults takes place because both parties wish it. However with prostitution, although the act may ostensibly be the same, there is now a very different power relationship between the two parties. One is participating for pleasure, the other to provide a service. However, it could also be argued that professionalisation has a liberating effect and so gives players more power. The laws of the workplace now govern professional rugby clubs. Consequently what was previously deemed as acceptable behaviour from coaches is now regarded as inappropriate. This point is highlighted by Mike Catt, who recalled that after one amateur match for Bath, the coach Jack Rowell showed his displeasure at Catt's performance by slapping him on the head.<sup>30</sup> Professional rugby players are a highly valued commodity, and it may be perceived that individually and collectively, they are the club's greatest assets. Although they may be replaceable, there is a greater responsibility on the club administrators to retain these assets. Recent evidence would suggest that they are certainly of greater value than the coach. For example, the Leicester Tigers (and World Cup winning) coach Bob Dwyer, was sacked partly because senior players were unhappy with his methods.<sup>31</sup> Harlequins sacked Dick Best after reports of



dissatisfaction from the players. He had been associated with the club as a successful coach for a long period but, while the players as amateurs tolerated his authoritarian approach, they were not prepared to accept his behaviour as paid employees. According to Will Carling:

He [Best] seemed to equate professionalism with an exaggerated work ethic...he drove all the fun out of training and out of the club...they [the players] wanted out and were talking to the agents to see whether their contracts contained exit clauses.<sup>32</sup>

As amateurs, rugby players had the right to expect some element of 'fun' in their sport, even at the highest level. The comments of Will Carling suggest that they were not entirely prepared for the reality of rugby as work. In much the same way as the RFU seemed to believe little would change, so the players had naïve expectations of how their sport would change.

Since rugby has become a professional sport, club rugby has become far more multi-national, as the players have migrated to where the best rewards are to be found. With no transfer fees to be taken into account (at least in the early days), there was something of a rush to sign players from any nation. Because of the structure of Southern Hemisphere rugby, where the Unions contract the best players, many of those who came over, were players who had their best playing days behind them and who no longer figured in the international plans of their home nations. The attraction for many English clubs was that these players were stars and would help to draw a crowd. Thus, ex-national captains such as Philippe Sella (France), Michael Lynagh (Australia), Zinzan Brooke (New Zealand) and Francois Pienaar (South Africa) came to England reportedly on annual salaries of more than £200,000. This gave them the opportunity to gain lucrative rewards for their years of unpaid effort. Within a year of the start of professionalism, there

were 105 non-English players registered for the twelve English First Division clubs.<sup>33</sup>

There were many players who were lured by the prospect of being well paid for pursuing their hobby, as the clubs sought to use their new (and in most instances temporary) wealth to secure their future at the top level. In some cases well-established careers as teachers, police officers and bank officials were abandoned almost overnight. Unfortunately for most of these players and clubs, reality quickly set in. The clubs could not sustain the wage bills and players found playing for money to be a rather insecure proposition. Salaries were cut, contracts cancelled and, in the worse cases, clubs went bankrupt. Only the very top players, whose services were in high demand, were safe from the financial difficulties of the clubs. Will Carling, one of those who was secure on a £150,000 salary, recognised that for most players such a lifestyle was likely to be short-lived:

A Joe Average England international can expect to earn £150,000-£175,000 if he has a good year for club and country, while the superstars are in the £200,000 plus bracket. The game cannot even begin to sustain that level of remuneration, given the income coming through the turnstiles.<sup>34</sup>

The demands on the players also increased as the two or three evenings a week that they spent at the club as amateurs, changed to reflect their status as full-time professionals. However, as some players were putting in time far beyond this minimum and maintaining another career, professionalism actually meant a reduction in their 'working week'. In the first months of full-time professional rugby, some clubs (and players) simply did not know what to do with the extra time:

I think both players and coaches probably felt we've got 7 days now, we'd better fill them... A lot of it was completely wasted, it probably had no benefit whatsoever to players, it probably had totally the opposite effect, tired them out and probably turned them off the game mentally towards the end of a long season.  
*Brian Ashton*



Gradually, the coaches came to terms with the problem and put in place a schedule that reflected the need for conditioning, team and individual skills and recuperation. Richard Cockerill, the Leicester Tigers hooker, outlined that in addition to a new emphasis on diet and alcohol, a typical weekly regime of the club is as follows:<sup>35</sup>

- Sunday: Post match session, swim, cycle and a Jacuzzi
- Monday and Tuesday: 2 hours conditioning followed by rugby skills in the afternoon
- Wednesday: Rugby skills in the afternoon
- Thursday: Rest day
- Friday: Team practice followed by travel or rest
- Saturday: Match day

The ingrained issue of loyalty was also felt by those on the other side of the fence as they found themselves in a position where they had to tell players their services were no longer required. As a player-coach, Francois Pienaar found it particularly difficult:

Any professional sporting squad is like a rose bush. If it is to bloom year after year, it requires prudent pruning by a skilled hand. With the benefit of hindsight, as a coach I lacked the willingness to make the tough decisions and let players go.<sup>36</sup>

Gradually, player/club loyalty is likely to become part of the residual hegemony as both parties take a pragmatic approach to professional rugby in much the same way as it happened in professional soccer. A further dose of reality came with the introduction of a salary cap introduced by EFDR in March 1999. This restricted the amount spent by clubs on players' wages to £1.8 million per year,

with a proposal for further reductions in the future to £1.65 million. For many clubs, this meant a reduction of players' salaries by about 15%, with greater reductions needed if clubs wished to attract stars from overseas; a factor that may not be conducive to maintaining the type of team-spirit that has been part of the tradition of rugby. Although the salary cap reduced the income of the average player in the Premier League to around £75,000,<sup>37</sup> it gave them some sense of security as the grants to the club guaranteed by the RFU matched the salary cap. It was only those players who were selected to the England squad who could expect the higher salaries, but those players would still have to face the weekly grind of league rugby.

I'm pretty sure a lot of clubs aren't adhering to it [the salary cap] but I think as a concept, short to mid-term, it works because it does provide viability. I think that's terribly important for players, but obviously as a sport we've just introduced a draft version of a collective bargaining agreement effectively. What we're saying is as the sports' revenue increases so does the players income. So I think for two or three years it's essential we have a stop gap measure in there to try and stem the haemorrhaging.

*Damian Hopley*

By comparison to the English experience of contractual obligations, players in South Africa were on a very different contract structure during the same period. Their major income came directly from the South African RFU and depended on their ability. This ranged from £70,000 per year for category A players, to £50,000 per year for category C players. In addition, there was an average £30,000 contract for Super 12 and provincial matches and those selected for test matches received £3,000 per test.<sup>38</sup> This gave them a similar income to their English counterparts but clearly their first loyalty was to the national side rather than their club/province. This approach ensured that players were prepared mentally and physically for the international matches, a direct contrast with the English experience.



At the moment we're looking for the England players to peak for November-Australia, Argentina, South Africa. Now I would imagine that is the last time their clubs will want them to peak because that's a third of the way into the season. I suspect that is why some of the rugby being played at the moment is not very good because different players from different clubs are at different levels and peak at different times.

*Brian Ashton*

Once rugby union had become a professional sport, there was no longer any logical reason to discriminate against those who had played rugby league. In fact, it was union that had the potential to be the more lucrative code and therefore the Rugby League ceased to be such a threat to the RFU. This led to improved relations between the two boards. The Laws relating to rugby league players were, therefore, abandoned and some of those who had been regarded as 'traitors' returned to the union fold. For the English national team, this had little immediate effect, as it was the other home nations who had been more susceptible to poaching from league clubs. The return of players such as Jonathan Davies, the Quinnell brothers, Alan Bateman and Scott Gibbs, undoubtedly strengthened the Welsh squad. The British Lions selectors had not only a greater depth of talent and experience to draw upon for the successful tour to South Africa in 1997, but also the added bonus of a more professional attitude to the sport. New players were also attracted from rugby league to rugby union, such as Henry and Robbie Paul, Jason Robinson and Gary Connolly, but with limited success most stayed for only one season. The presence of those players who had been professional for a number of years, may have had a galvanising effect on both clubs and players as they realised how professionalism could raise their standards:

The Rugby League lads were very focused and streets ahead in terms of physical conditioning. The Bath players got one hell of a shock because they thought they were ahead of the rest of them in the Premiership but these guys were in a different league altogether.

*Brian Ashton*

Despite all the years of prejudice against league players, the RFU were forced to look to that source for players to place under contract. In August 2000, Jason Robinson of Wigan was the first player to be contracted to Club England. They had first call on his services, in contrast to the rest of the squad, whose primary contract was with their clubs. In all likelihood, this was part of a strategy by the RFU to gradually persuade the leading players to transfer their allegiances once their existing contracts expired.

### **The game**

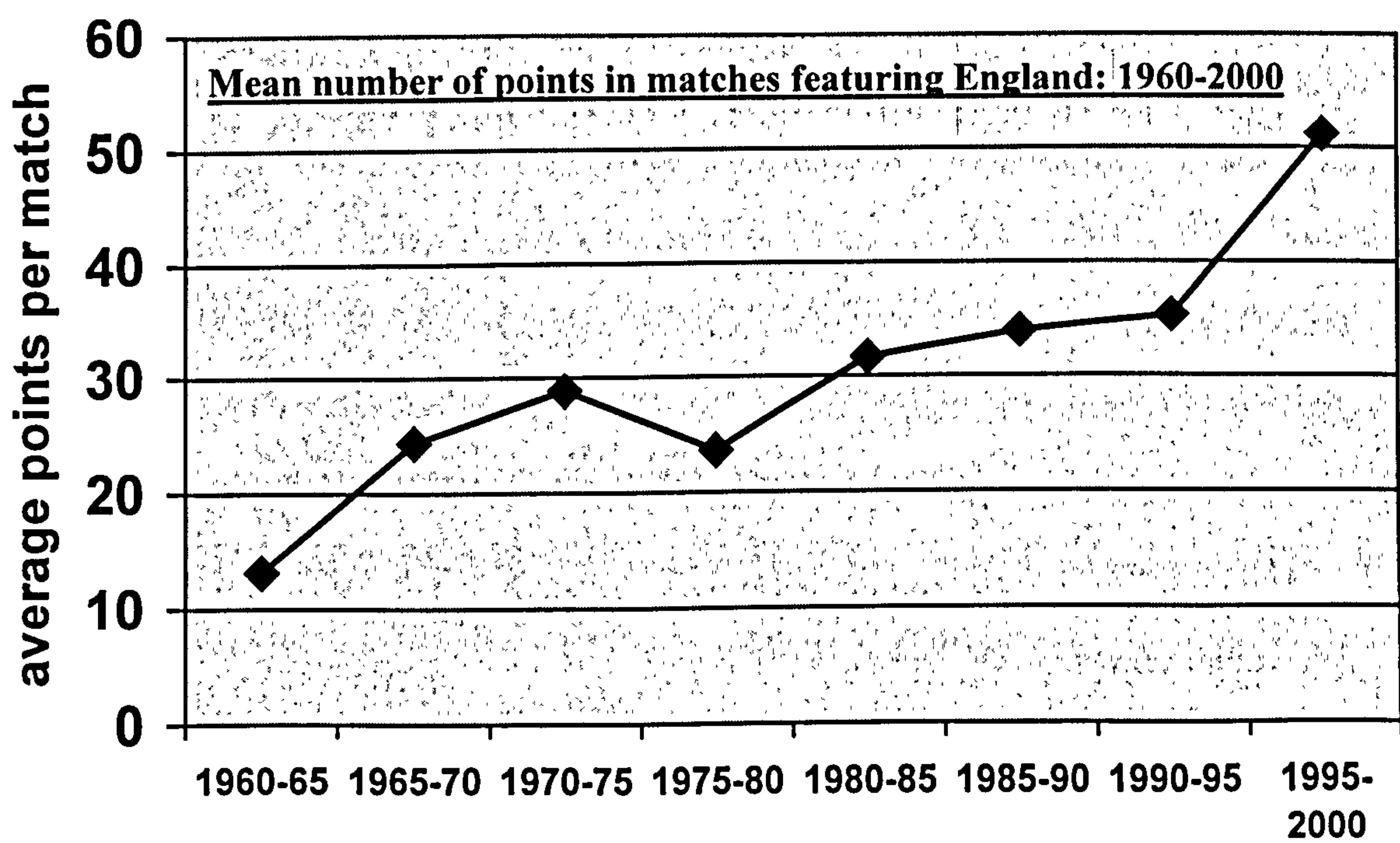
As a professional sport, rugby union came under increasing pressure to compete with other sports and attract more spectators both to the grounds and to television. The commercialisation process involves sport becoming more closely linked with the forces that govern the market. This leads away from the intrinsic nature of the sport, where the rules are devised for the enjoyment of the players, to one where the value of the sport as a form of entertainment is more important. It has been suggested that the structure of the sport is affected in a number of ways:<sup>39</sup>

- The spectacle element is increased.
- There is a need to increase the uncertainty of a specific event.
- Action is speeded up.
- There is an increased rate of scoring.

With specific reference to rugby, it can be seen that the need to compete with soccer and rugby league has led to developments that have made the sport more attractive to the spectator. In addition to the changes in the laws over the last 40 years that have made the game quicker and emphasised running and handling rather than static events, there have also been recent moves to ‘jazz up’ the sport.



Players have worn their names on their shirts to make them more identifiable and there is pre-match and half-time entertainment. The uncertainty of the outcome of matches has been developed by the introduction of the league system and latterly by the development of the European Cup. There have also been proposals for a ‘Super League’ involving the top teams from a number of European countries. In terms of rate of scoring, the following graph shows that there has been a gradual increase in the rate of scoring in matches featuring England over the last four decades. There has been a dramatic increase (41%) in the number of points scored in the last five years (when rugby became a professional sport), compared to the previous five. There has also been a 300% increase in the average number of points scored since the early 1960s when rugby started to become commercial/professional (it should also be noted that there have been two changes to the points system during this period).



The quest for a commercially attractive sport was the very same problem as the one faced by the Northern Union one hundred years before. Rugby league became a different sport to rugby union because of the commercial pressures to change and not because the players were rough northern louts. It was, therefore, almost inevitable that Union would develop in a similar way and the period since 1995 has seen the two sports move together in a number of ways. The lineouts, which were abandoned by the Northern Union in 1897, have remained in a form that allows the team in possession to retain the ball far more than was the case in the past. Although the Laws that allow the jumper to be hoisted up by his colleagues have certainly enabled teams to develop a wide range of attacking ploys from the lineout, they have removed the individual contests that were previously an integral part of rugby:

In my position [2<sup>nd</sup> row], it used to be you would have an individual contest against your opponent. You would look at who you were playing against and sometimes think “Oh no” and you would have to work out ways of beating them. Today it is more down to the hooker being accurate, they had to be accurate before but now it is really important. The lineouts and scrums are too predictable, that is why teams make defending so important and have defensive coaches.

*Bill Beaumont*

It is the ability to retain possession for several phases that has become vital in rugby and to a large extent, rule changes and referees interpretations of the Laws have led to teams being able to retain possession for up to twenty or more phases. Once again, Rugby Union and League have moved closer together with the rucking laws following a tackle. This reflects the ‘play the ball’ aspect of League, the main difference being that in League there are only six tackles permitted, in union there is no limit. The increasing fitness, discipline and organisation in top class rugby in the year 2000 has seen defensive formations that seem, at times, to be almost impenetrable. Because defenders know that it is almost impossible to



win the ball in a ruck, they will commit the minimum number of defenders to the ruck, the rest will be spread in a flat line across the width of the pitch *à la* rugby league.

In the early days of rugby there were no referees and in later years the presence of the referee was seen as an extra obstacle to be overcome, so that teams could use a variety of strategies to dominate the opposition:

At certain times certain throws would go to back of lineout so that the referee would follow the ball and front row players could punch someone at the front.

*Ruari Maclean*

In the professional era, however, the referee has become an integral part of the entertainment. Not only are they often wired for sound to enable television viewers to listen to the decisions, but they also act very much as conductors of an orchestra, rather than arbiters of the laws. At the top level, they continually talk to the players with phrases such as “leave the ball alone seven” or “get back onside twelve” advising the players and almost imploring them to refrain from breaking the law and, therefore, stopping the flow of the game. Rugby would seem to be unique in this use of referees and it is an indication of how anxious the authorities are to maximise the entertainment value of their sport.

Similarly, there have been moves to sanitise rugby by removing elements of violent play, particularly with televised matches and therefore, make the sport more palatable to civilised society. Less emphasis is now placed on physical intimidation and the increased involvement of touch-judges looking for foul play, together with tougher sanctions has seen a significant reduction of violence at the top level. This may be a disappointment to some die-hard spectators (and journalists) in much the same way as the abolition of hacking was mourned by some over a century ago. Perhaps, for them, it would have been preferable for

professional rugby to follow the example of professional ice hockey and have violence as part of the entertainment. The Editor of “Inside Rugby” was one individual who expressed a desire for a return of the traditional macho image of rugby:

This may be shocking but for me, there’s nothing quite as entertaining as a good old fashioned punch-up on the rugby field...When I look back on some of my fondest memories of the game, violence seems to play an inordinately large role in most of them...It’s been a bit barren lately as the old enforcers have been pensioned off to be replaced by sleek thoroughbreds who know that if they so much as take a swing at an opponent they risk losing their livelihood.<sup>40</sup>

It is possible that recent captains of England have been appointed as much for their PR capabilities as their leadership on the field of play. When Will Carling was appointed in 1988, there were a number of better qualified candidates in terms of leadership experience, as Carling himself has admitted.<sup>41</sup> It is doubtful if any player would have had the same impact off the field as Carling, who appealed to a wide section of the population. By the time Carling retired as England captain, rugby had gone from a sport that only made the back pages of the newspapers, to one which also featured on the front page. His high profile made his relationships with women news items and his friendship with the late Princess of Wales further heightened the news worthiness of rugby players. In the amateur period, the lower profile of the sport meant that a relatively small percentage of the general public were aware of the identity of the leading players and their private lives were of little interest to the media. By 1998, British Lions captain Martin Johnson was appearing naked on billboards across the country in an advert to sell Tetley Bitter. The modern rugby player has a much higher profile and is subject to the same sort of media interest that has been faced by soccer and cricket players for a number of years. This level of intrusion manifested itself when England captain, Lawrence Dallaglio was the feature of a media ‘sting’, which implicated him as a drug-taking



playboy. Although Dallaglio was later cleared of the accusations, he had shown sufficiently poor judgement in dealing with the world outside rugby to be relieved of the captaincy of his country. He was, to some extent, the victim of a change of circumstances brought about by the higher profile and news worthiness of professional rugby players.

A further interesting adjunct to professional rugby has been the apparent change in the concept of masculine behaviour. As an activity that tested physical prowess, rugby union was for many the epitome of a masculine sport and the behaviour of rugby players compared favourably to that of soccer players. While soccer players kissed and hugged each other after scoring, rugby players restricted themselves to a wry smile and a manly handshake (for example, the response by and to Gareth Edwards following the ‘greatest try ever’ in 1971<sup>a</sup>). The professional era, however, has seen a steady progression towards soccer style celebrations and moves away from the traditions of the sport:

When you scored a try people would just say “well done” none of this hugging and kissing. It was just a matter of course.

*Tommy Wallis*

While soccer players would writhe on the floor in apparent agony if anyone touched them, part of the rugby hegemony was that you tried to avoid showing you were hurt (as indicated by the title of Mike Burton’s autobiography ‘Never Stay Down’). Rugby union had developed over the years into a sport where men could show their masculine prowess. In 1931 Watcyn Thomas of Wales broke his collar bone at the start of the second half against Scotland. As replacements were unheard of in those days, he not only carried on for the rest of the game, but also scored the try which brought his team back into the match, eventually securing a

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<sup>a</sup> Barbarians versus New Zealand.. Edwards ended a passage of play that had started near their own try line.

13-8 victory.<sup>42</sup> J.P.R. Williams returned to the field after having his cheek pierced by studs in 1978, and in Australia during the second Test match of 1983, Jean Pierre Rives played the entire game with his right arm hanging limply by his side. He had dislocated his shoulder four times in a match only fourteen days earlier but, as captain of the side, he felt he had to play, even though he did not tackle, bind properly on the scrum or handle the ball. One of the Australian players, Mark Loan a doctor, said of his decision to play “it was bravery to the point of insanity”.<sup>43</sup> Yet today’s professional rugby players appear to be more fragile than their predecessors and require the involvement of the physiotherapist more often. Recently, a former England captain was identified on a television replay as over-dramatising an innocuous challenge, presumably in an attempt to gain the referee’s sympathy and/or a penalty. This would suggest that a new hegemony is emerging which recognises that in a commercial era it is the end result that is more important than the means by which the result was achieved. Hence, we not only have players being replaced because of relatively minor injuries and because they are showing signs of fatigue, but also for tactical reasons, a major shift in the accepted norm for rugby. Further, the professional era has seen the re-emergence of the scrumcaps of previous eras and the advent of the sort of body armour worn in American Football and Rugby League. This may add to the athletic countenance of the players but it is certainly a departure from the days when the only protection that was acceptable, was a gum shield. Recent research has suggested however, that although the level of violence has diminished in rugby, the number of injuries has actually increased. This has been explained as a direct result of the changes to rugby brought on by professionalism. The players are larger, faster and stronger and so the tackles or ‘hits’ are bigger. Because of the need to entertain, the ball is



in play for longer and so there are more big hits per game and because there are more matches, there are more hits per season. The results that show an increase of over 20% in the number of injuries may also be due to the most recent impact of commercialism. Players are sponsored to wear protective clothing and this in itself encourages high-speed contact by giving the players a false sense of security. Further, payment for playing could lead to pressure on players to take part in training and matches when they are not completely fit. This pressure may come because a player needs to hide an injury in order to maximise his playing opportunities or from the coach or employer needing to exploit their assets.<sup>44</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Professional rugby has had a sobering effect at all levels of the game. Although there are players who may feel that they can now be justly rewarded for their skill and effort there has been a significant price to pay for this. The levels of remuneration achieved by relatively few players hides the fact that others have failed to reap the benefits of professional rugby. In some cases individuals have abandoned careers outside of sport, only to return later as the number of players that rugby union was able to sustain diminished. There are some millionaires who are slightly less rich following their involvement with rugby union and although some benefactors/entrepreneurs remain in the sport, many have left. While there are those clubs who have either affirmed their position amongst the elite or have attained such a position during this period, there are others who have either ceased to exist or have found themselves significantly worse off after their brush with professionalism. The number of clubs who are truly professional has been significantly reduced and below the Premier League the trend is for either part-

time professionals who train two or three evenings a week, or a complete reversion to amateur rugby for those who find their coffers completely empty.

The sport itself has changed drastically. It is significantly faster, the tackles are fiercer yet ironically, the game is also cleaner than previously. It has come to resemble a physical game of chess with strategy all-important as players are used as integral parts of a master plan. The forwards are Pawns battering away at the opposition, creating space and time for the Knights and Bishops, prompted by the all-important fly half as the Queen. The players are fitter, stronger and faster than ever before, due to the time that full-time professional sport allows them to devote to their craft. This has led to a need to adjust the laws, as players are more able to adapt to the demands of the sport. This in itself causes further difficulties, as the laws are framed for a full-time elite but are also played by the less fit dabblers of the lower levels of rugby. While it may be necessary to tinker with the laws to create more space and continuity for the top level, those same laws may cause disillusionment at lower levels, as the players struggle to come to terms with an unfamiliar sport. While twelfth phase possession may be the aim of players in the England squad, for those in a clubs 5<sup>th</sup> XV such a prospect would be unthinkable.

One of the attractions of rugby was that it catered for all types and even into the 1990s, there were those in the England team with whom the players at lower levels could identify. There were still roly-poly props (Gareth Chilcott) and beanpole 2<sup>nd</sup> Rows (Martin Bayfield) and ascetic full backs (Jonathan Webb). In today's squad, however, there is a homogeneity of physiques with athletic muscularity and low body fat to the fore. It may be that it is this inability to play rugby in the same style as seen on television (few props below first team are able to lift their 2<sup>nd</sup> row jumpers more than a few inches of the ground for example),



that has contributed to a downturn in the number of people playing rugby. The similarity between Rugby League and Rugby Union has also increased, potentially preparing the ground for a future merging of the two codes.

The downside of the increased revenue has been that fewer people than ever are able to watch rugby on television. Rugby Special may have had its critics but it did enable people to watch on a regular basis and contributed to the marketing of the sport. In a similar vein, as rugby struggles to attract spectators, those who do attend are being asked to pay a higher premium, especially to watch England, where it is difficult to visit Twickenham on a match day for less than £100. This is hardly conducive to attracting young people to the sport and is likely to maintain the middle-class elitist image of rugby.

In order to retain a semblance of control over the sport, the RFU has been forced to concede its authority over the sport to those who control the dozen or so professional clubs. When, in 1995 EFDR demanded that the RFU give each club £1 million, it was dismissed as absurd. Yet five years later, those clubs in the Premier League are guaranteed almost double that figure; an indication of just how far the RFU has gone in order to appease the elite clubs. Although it cannot be doubted that it is the players these clubs employ that bring in this revenue via the club and international competitions, the vast majority of these players have come through the system from lower level clubs. It is these clubs who have been unable to get the revenue and support from the RFU. For example, Neil Back is unequivocally one of the stars of the professional era for England and Leicester Tigers with his all-round skills and fitness level. He started his rugby career with Barkers Butts and then Nottingham, both of whom have faced severe difficulties in recent years. Without such clubs, players like Back may be lost to rugby, yet the

control of the sport is being handed to clubs for whom short term results and profit margins are the overriding factor. There are signs that the RFU is prepared to go even further, as the Andrew Plan calls for a committee to be set up to run professional and international rugby. This would have an independent chairperson and would consist of three representatives from the RFU and three from EFDR. This further reduces the authority of the RFU and is unlikely to benefit either the international team or the majority of the clubs.

As a player who had gained a great deal from rugby as an amateur sport, Bill Beaumont expressed his doubts about whether rugby, as a fully professional sport, could maintain the same benefits for the players. In the professional era, he is part of the RFU management and very close to professional rugby and although he recognises that there have been problems in transition, he also recognises that the changes in the sport since his playing days had already gone a long way towards professionalism:

I was right when I said that [players should not be paid] but times have changed. That was before we had World Cups, there was no Tri-Nations. For 99% of the players rugby is still an amateur game. What is a problem is that the changeover to professional rugby was mismanaged. The sport has suffered from that, but we will get it sorted out and I am sure it will still be a great sport. Rugby for me was a very serious activity; it was my whole life. What today's players need to realise is professionalism is not about money, it's about making sure you do your best. For professional golfers it's not just about shooting a 64, it's the hundreds of hours of practice they put in before and, when they have got their 64, they will still go out onto the practice ground to try to cure some little fault they have noticed. Professional golfers, tennis players, snooker players, I admire them for their dedication to practice.

*Bill Beaumont*



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<sup>5</sup> Ashley Levett, benefactor of Richmond, cited in P. Charles, (1996), "Millionaires Playing Ground" in Rugby World October 1996 pp20-28

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<sup>32</sup> W. Carling, (1998), My Autobiography, Hodder & Stoughton, London pp258-259

<sup>33</sup> CRSS Sports Resources, (1997), The Globalisation of Sport, [www.le.ac.uk/crss/info/resource/global.html](http://www.le.ac.uk/crss/info/resource/global.html),

<sup>34</sup> W. Carling, op. cit. p202

<sup>35</sup> R. Cockerill & M. Tanner, op. cit.

<sup>36</sup> F. Pienaar, op. cit. pp295-296

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> M Keohane, , (2000), 'Sporting Chances' in LeisureLife Autumn, pp22-27, Bridget McCarney, Eppindust

<sup>39</sup> J. Maguire, op. cit.

<sup>40</sup> J. O'Regan, (1998), "In Praise of the Punch Up" in Inside Rugby July/August 1998, p7

<sup>41</sup> D. Norrie, (1993) , Will Carling: The Authorised Biography, Headline Books, London

<sup>42</sup> W. Thomas, (1977), Rugby-Playing Man, Pelham, London

<sup>43</sup> P. Bills, (1986), Jean-Pierre Rives: A Modern Corinthian, Allen & Unwin, London, p110

<sup>44</sup> N. Cain, (2000), "Injury Double Jeopardy" in The Sunday Times 1/10/2000 p15,



# **CONCLUSION**

The past century and a half of rugby, has seen periods of great change and also periods of apparent stability. The final questions raised by this thesis concern the power to affect or resist change and the effect of professionalisation on the sport.

The origins of football developed from the mob games popular throughout Europe, but the codification of this activity into rugby football came from the public schools of 19<sup>th</sup> Century England. Without any formal organisation to bring the different groups together, it was the public schools (particularly Rugby School) and the major universities that were the power in rugby. They determined both the formal laws of the game and also the spirit in which rugby should be played. By the time the Rugby Football Union was founded in 1871, the sport had evolved into an activity that characterised the contemporary ideals of athleticism, with an emphasis on manliness, a sense of fair play, teamwork and not trying too hard. This attitude to games was part of the English character and was something that observers from overseas found difficult to understand:

Now and again the doctrine of playing the game is misinterpreted or exaggerated until it becomes meaningless...It has been so vehemently insisted upon that people come to think that there is something ungentlemanly and discreditable in wishing and trying with might and main to win.<sup>1</sup>

It was this aspect of how you played the game rather than the result, that became one of the fundamental cornerstones of rugby and it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which this was myth or reality. It was those clubs who could claim pre-eminence because of their role in founding the RFU and their links via their members to the public schools and universities, that were the governing force in rugby in the early years. The dominant pattern of sports participation for middle and upper class fun in the late 19th Century was challenged by the involvement of the lower middle class and working class in popular sport. The development not only of serious internal



competition, but also international competition resulted in conflict between residual and emergent hegemony.

This conflict crystallised in rugby into a dispute between the clubs in the north of England and those in the south of England. Matches between clubs representing different attitudes, appear to belie the notion that it was the north that had the monopoly on an instrumental approach to rugby, with both sides apparently intent on proving their manliness. A Blackheath player recalled a match against a northern team in 1881:

Their idea evidently was “there’s a team of southern amateurs, let’s frighten them by playing rough,” and they did play rough. But they never made a greater mistake in their lives. At half-time Blackheath had thirteen men left and the others eleven. The rest had taken cabs to the nearest hospital.<sup>2</sup>

The reference attached to the ‘amateur’ status of the Blackheath club, is an indication that the sport was suffering from a diversification of interpretation according to local norms. Professional sport was very much part of the working class culture and with players being forced to miss work to play (and at times to train), many clubs saw nothing wrong with compensating players for lost wages. Not only did the majority of players and clubs in the south decry the need to train for their leisure activities; they also had no such requirements of broken-time payments. There was an increasing domination of the sport by working class players, as witnessed by the superiority of Yorkshire and Lancashire in the County Championship from the late 1880s and also the number of northern players in the England team during the same period. This caused those who espoused amateur ideals, to demand that those players and clubs that did not adhere to amateurism should be banned. When the supporters of amateur rugby won their case at the AGM in 1893, they showed no concerns for compromise or reconciliation. The northern press was under no illusion that the potential loss of many leading players might sway the resolve of the RFU:

It [the RFU] would have to sacrifice many fine exponents of the game doubtless, but it would not hesitate. It would lose a good many international games, but it would still not hesitate.<sup>3</sup>

The schism of 1895 enabled the RFU to establish its own definition of how amateur rugby union should be played. It was to be a game that was to be played by informal arrangements between clubs, without the presence of knockout competitions (apart from the County Championship) and leagues. This enabled clubs to arrange their fixtures with clubs who reflected a similar standard of play both in terms of ability and attitude. To emphasise the non-serious nature of the sport, formal practice sessions and coaching were discouraged and remuneration of any kind was forbidden. This established rugby union as a sport for dabblers from the higher echelons of society. The presence of an alternative code amongst the working class further safeguarded the amateur ideals, ensuring that only gentlemen would play rugby union.

At this stage, the RFU had been able to establish its power because it was in accord with the clubs and players. The stance on amateurism closely reflected the beliefs of a sufficiently large section of the membership. The eventual exclusion of the proponents of professionalism gave the RFU a huge mandate to protect its amateur ideals. Having established its power over the clubs and individuals that wished to play rugby union, the RFU, through its dominance of the IRB, was able to establish this definition amongst all those countries that played rugby. Although such a broad definition did not always fit in with the culture of other countries, there was little real opposition to the principle. In practice, countries interpreted amateurism in their own way and over the years began to distance themselves from the RFU standpoint.

In England, amateur sport retained its position at the heart of middle and upper class culture, particularly after the Great War. Athletics, tennis, cricket and rugby



were considered befitting activities for gentlemen. Professional sport was largely left to the working class, particularly as the rewards available were usually not of any great significance. The role of sport as a recreational activity was maintained with the notion of 'may the best man win'; an indication that endeavour was permitted provided it was within certain boundaries. The authority of the RFU was never really questioned and its doctrine of how rugby should be played still reflected the dominant hegemony during this period. With the exception of international matches, there was little financial income in rugby and the experience of the Northern Union/Rugby League had shown that organising rugby as a commercial concern was a hazardous venture. The clubs themselves had no basis for power, as they had little contact with each other outside their occasional matches during the playing season. Although fixture lists were evolving into exclusive arrangements between clubs, in the absence of leagues and cups there was no real way of determining the leading clubs in the country and therefore, there was no homogenous group of clubs to challenge the RFU.

The period from 1918 to 1960 appears, on the surface, to be one of stability for amateurism. The RFU was in firm control of the sport and was resisting any attempts to commercialise rugby. This was achieved by rebutting any offers to link rugby with sponsorship. Television exposure was kept to a minimum, which ensured that any individual, club, or country that flirted with professionalism was dealt with in a pertinent manner. Yet, there were imperceptible modifications to the amateur code taking place during this period, that reflected the changes taking place in broader society. The growth of international sport had brought with it either a sense of pride or disappointment at the accomplishments of the national team. Performances against traditional opponents in different sports were used as a yardstick to determine the status of the country. This was inevitably translated slowly, but surely, into pressure

to perform for those players selected for international duty. Specialisation, physical fitness, tactics and an emphasis on results started to become an integral part of rugby. The change was very slight at first, but over the decades there was a growing requirement that players who wanted to play at the top level had to make a few sacrifices along the way. The era of top level rugby for dabblers was coming to an end. This was particularly true of the Southern Hemisphere rugby nations, where their cultures emphasised the pursuit of excellence rather than being a good loser. The RFU was also under pressure from overseas in two forms. Firstly, the Southern Hemisphere countries were calling for law changes to make the sport more attractive and also for the relaxation of certain aspects of the amateur ethos. Secondly, their playing strength, coupled with the increased frequency of matches between the countries, brought pressure to compete on the field. Although England and the RFU retained a position of pre-eminence in the sport due to their traditional role, it was in fact New Zealand, Australia and South Africa who were the most powerful nations in world rugby and they were the ones setting the trends.

Until the 1960s, the top clubs and the elite players were virtually powerless within the RFU and so they may have developed a false consciousness in the respect that the clubs were content with their fixture lists and the players were grateful for the chance to occasionally tour. A hierarchy of clubs developed as those clubs with access to resources became more powerful by different routes. From the 1960s, major changes were taking place within society and rugby was forced to adapt to these changes. Professionalism in sport was beginning to be recognised as a benefit rather than an unfortunate feature. The level of skill that the full-time professional sports performer could develop became appreciated and the increase in remuneration that was available began to elevate the status of such performers. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and



to a lesser extent the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, it was the gifted amateur who was held in high esteem and the professional who was looked down upon. The amateur was regarded as the artist, with the professional being viewed more as an artisan. It is difficult to trace the exact date when there was a change of opinion, but it could be argued that from a period shortly before World War II, there was an emerging hegemony that a professional attitude to sport was honourable. Those who succeeded in sport after the War tended to be those, amateur and professional, who approached their sport with a degree of professionalism. In athletics, competitors such as Roger Bannister, Lynn Davies and David Hemery, prepared and trained for their competitions in the most professional manner they could. They were not dabblers and when they could no longer devote the time and energy their sport required (notably Roger Bannister) they retired. In rugby, while there was still room for the occasional genius such as Barry John, who took pride in his lack of preparation, increasingly, top level rugby became self-selecting as only those with the appropriate attitude succeeded. Today, professionalism in sport is highly respected and the dedication and attention to detail from performers such as Steve Redgrave, Lennox Lewis, Tiger Woods and David Beckham, is seen as commendable. Those who do not prepare and seem to have little respect for their sport, such as Paul Gascoigne and Mike Tyson, are seen as rich playboys for whom sport is an occasional distraction. Even in cricket a player such as David Gower, despite his skill and success, came to be regarded as something of an anachronism. His attitude to sport was too cavalier and apparently uncaring and by the late 20<sup>th</sup> century his demeanour represented the residual hegemony of the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

Within society from the 1960s, there was a far wider range of leisure activities to choose from and rugby was seen by many as a little boring and lacking in real

excitement or challenge. Recruitment was a problem for many clubs, with Old Boys' clubs forced to go 'open' and clubs in general compelled to recruit from wider afield. Greater diversity in the type of player (lower middle class) involved in rugby, resulted in a democratisation of the sport. During the last three decades of amateur rugby, the leading clubs became more powerful as they formed different associations, either loosely defined as Senior Clubs or the more structured Gate Taking Clubs. These clubs started to challenge the authority of the RFU, who maintained their view that cups and leagues ought not to be part of amateur rugby. Despite initial resistance to such changes, the RFU eventually gave in to this pressure and by doing so, further eroded the possibility of retaining amateurism in rugby. By making such concessions, not only was the RFU intensifying the seriousness of club rugby but it was also increasing the power of the clubs by enabling them to further develop a hierarchy. For the first time, clubs were ranked not only by their fixture list, but also by their success on the field and players with aspirations to play at the highest level would gravitate to those clubs with similar objectives:

I left Fylde Rugby Club to join Orrell because I got so fed up with travelling up to Fylde and finding that half the team weren't there on Monday night for training and I was trying to get as far as I could in the game.

*Brian Ashton*

While I was at Birmingham, I had been selected for the Midlands and I was reserve for an England side and I'd had five years at Birmingham and captained the club and I enjoyed it thoroughly. But I suppose I was ambitious having gone for an England Trial and I thought if I played at a better level then maybe I've got a better chance to see how far I can go really and I picked Coventry.

*Barry Corless*

From the 1970s there was a growing emphasis on coaching, first at national level and later it became commonplace amongst the clubs. The introduction of leagues in England and the World Cup in 1987 proved to be something of a watershed in rugby:



Prior to the introduction of the leagues, there were these ideas of merit tables. There was a Daily Telegraph Merit Table and then things started to become a little bit more serious. It didn't matter a great deal but the results were published in some kind of a league form in the newspaper and if you came top you got a Daily Telegraph pennant and you could fly it at the club so it began to become more serious. But I would say the turning point was the leagues.

*Bernard White*

From 1987, the entire power base of rugby changed. The old order that gave the RFU authority over the clubs, the players and other countries, was coming to an end. The intensity of competition that the leagues gave to domestic rugby and the World Cup gave to international rugby, pushed the sport ever closer to professionalism. Increasingly, the RFU found itself in a difficult, if not impossible position as its stance on amateurism diverged from the dominant hegemony of sports participation at elite level. Sports such as athletics and tennis that had staunchly supported the amateur principle had become fully professional. Even those performers who remained amateur were urged to adopt a 'professional' approach in order to become successful. The RFU was itself part of a drift towards professionalism. Financial responsibilities compelled the RFU to become involved in commercial ventures and the desire for success increased the demands on international players.

By the 1990s, it was unlikely that many members of the public actually cared whether the top players were paid a fair remuneration for the time and effort they put in to provide entertainment for millions of people. The RFU, however, was seeking to maintain its position and perhaps even strengthen the amateur ethos. The RFU was able to resist the clamour for professional rugby, because it was secure in the knowledge that there was no viable alternative for the clubs or the players. One of the international players, Jeff Probyn, was certain that even as late as 1993, the RFU had no intention of moving closer to professional rugby:

The Rugby Union reflects its origins and to this day is rooted in public schools, universities and the Services. For them playing rugby is a matter of being able to

afford it, whereas in other countries which do not have the same kind of history they are more commercially aware. England could always go back to more amateurism, not less, and other countries in the Northern Hemisphere might be tempted to follow them.<sup>4</sup>

Professionalism in sport was the dominant cultural hegemony by the 1990s, but only if there were finances available to support it and the RFU was the only organisation with access to the necessary funds. Although some clubs may have been able to pay their players generous 'expenses', there was no avenue for them to break away from the RFU and hope to survive on their spectator base. All this changed because of the power of television. While previous plans for a professional circus for rugby union had floundered due to lack of funds, the money that Rupert Murdoch was prepared to put forward made it a certainty. The IRB felt it had no alternative but to allow rugby union to become professional and the RFU agreed to the proposal. Tony Hallett, the RFU Secretary, acknowledged the about face the RFU was forced into:

We at the RFU had fought against the World Cup, never liked payment on tours (broken time payment in a sense); we were the last to come on board with player pools and promotions, we were determined to hold back the tide. We had been brought up like that in the committees... We were all guardians of an exemplary amateur sport but time and man overtook us.<sup>5</sup>

It is interesting that the RFU believed they had to agree to professional rugby despite the fact that they had defended the concept of amateurism for over a century. The arguments they faced were very similar to those put forward by the northern clubs in 1893. In fact the number of players and clubs who wanted some form of professional rugby in 1893 was probably greater than in 1995. The RFU (and indeed the IRB) could have stood firm, allowed Murdoch to replicate the Northern Union and simply carried on without the top international players. There are, however, two main differences between the events of 1893 and 1995. Firstly the position of amateur sport in the cultural hegemony had gone from dominant in 1893 to residual in 1995, making it



more difficult to defend the concept. The second and more significant factor is that the RFU had allowed the amateur concept to erode over the hundred years from 1895, until there was little left to defend. The original concept of rugby as a non-serious recreational activity had been diminished piece by piece, as each part of the amateur ideal was forsaken. With each step that the RFU took to enable rugby to be taken more seriously, such as specialisation; meeting before matches; coaching and training; law changes to make the sport more entertaining; replacements; cups; leagues and the intensity of internationals, they were in effect abandoning amateurism. The speed of the change over the first few decades was slow, but over the last three decades those changes accelerated rugby towards becoming a professional sport.

From when I started playing in 1966 until I stopped coaching in 1995, I think there were players and clubs and coaches who had moved on from rugby being a hobby to it being the most important thing in their lives.

*Brian Ashton*

I started work in 1994 for a money broking firm in the City. I had to be up at 6.30 and then I'd be into work at 7.15. I would train probably during lunch time, back again that night, train some more, drive back across town again to Wasps and then have some food and go to bed. So it was very much a full time work/play situation, it was like holding down 2 jobs. I remember vividly an England training session when Jack [Rowell] asked how many of us worked. Quite a lot of us put our hands up and he said "Well look you've got to start thinking seriously about whether you can commit to both and whether rugby is a full time job or not."

*Damian Hopley*

By 1995, the only part of amateurism left to defend was the issue of being paid to play and in every other respect rugby was a professional sport. In 1893, the RFU had been able to call on the support of the clubs to defend the issue of amateurism but, by 1995, there were few clubs who had any real conviction that professionalism would damage rugby. It was because the RFU had tried so long to defend this final aspect of amateurism against all logic, that they were so unprepared to deal with the different issues that professional rugby would face. The existing level of

professionalism in 1995, seemed to give the RFU the impression that the status quo would be maintained except that players would be paid for playing. If the RFU had acted quickly and followed the example of New Zealand, Australia and South Africa and placed the top players under contract, then this would probably have been a reasonable supposition. To be fair to the RFU, it would have been difficult to predict that somebody else could offer the players sufficient security and a level of remuneration that would tempt them to sign long-term contracts. The moratorium the RFU declared for twelve months, giving the clubs and players “the right to decide”, may have been an attempt to allow a democratic process to select the most appropriate model for rugby. Alternatively, this delaying tactic may also be interpreted as a further attempt by the RFU to avoid the issue of professional rugby and to devote more time to meaningless committees and perhaps ultimately to have sufficient support from traditional sources to dismiss the proposal altogether. In previous decades, the clubs and players had been prepared to allow the RFU to determine the organisation of the sport. Over the last decade of amateur rugby, such had been the loss of authority of the RFU, that neither the players nor clubs were prepared to wait. The moves towards a limited amount of professionalism that the Southern Hemisphere countries had allowed from the early 1990s had been denied to England players and it is unlikely that they had any faith in the commitment of the RFU to any new dawn.

It was left to those ambitious clubs with wealthy benefactors to determine the future of English rugby. Although the gates at even the best supported clubs were too low to sustain professional rugby, this was not an essential aspect of profitability for sport in the 1990s. The USA had shown for a number of years that television could underwrite professional sport and provide a high level of return for players and



owners. This pattern had been confirmed as viable in England with the funding of the Premier League in soccer by SKY. The RFU failed to realise that for a number of years, their power source in rugby had been the elite players and that whoever controlled those players also controlled professional rugby. From 1995, power was held in the clubs that had wealthy backers/sponsors who were able to offer high wages and to sign the top players. The events of the five years from 1995 saw the emergence of a new breed of club within the English game. Some of the traditional clubs such as Bath and Leicester adapted to the new era, others such as Moseley, Richmond, London Scottish, Coventry and Nottingham, went into severe and in some cases, terminal decline. The clubs had the power to challenge the authority of the RFU at all levels and the RFU was compelled to concede more and more, until in effect the owners of the top clubs controlled top level rugby in England. Without the players, the RFU now had few options, as all of their sources of power were severely diminished. The clubs were successfully challenging bureaucratic power. Their patriarchal power had also been eroded, as the traditions associated with the organisation became less meaningful. Coercive power was still available, but it had to be used with prudence. If they banned the clubs, the RFU could have created a second schism. The clubs would have been compelled to set up their own league and although in theory, because of their status within the IRB, the RFU controlled international rugby, in practice their position may have been less secure. When the leading clubs withdrew their players from the tour to Australia and New Zealand in 1998, the response of these countries to such a severely weakened team left the RFU under no illusion. There was a real threat that any organisation that could guarantee to produce a team containing the best England players would be offered the fixtures – regardless of their official status. The political manoeuvring continued throughout this

period, with the RFU being forced into a careful balancing act between the different factions in order to retain some authority and control over the sport.

For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, there was an imbalance of resources in favour of the Senior Clubs and the pyramid system of league rugby allowed small clubs to challenge this imbalance. Even before rugby became a professional sport, it was apparent that the old order were worried about their position. The accusations about illegal payments and player poaching became much more prevalent once the National Leagues started and the so called 'Senior Clubs' had their elite positions threatened. Initially leagues made very little difference to the status quo, but gradually the pyramid system enabled clubs to find their true level. By 1995, there was a new elite established at the top of the English game, consisting of clubs that were hungry for success with coaches, players and administrators who shared the same approach to rugby; a desire for excellence:

When I was coaching, the second time around, from 1980 to 1985, the notion that anything other than winning was acceptable, still was not the norm. The norm was - we are a serious rugby club, we play for fun, our fun is winning.

*John White*

This development meant that those in positions of power within the clubs, tended to share the dominant hegemony of modern sport and therefore deprived the RFU of its traditional source of support. If the clubs' committees were the guardians of amateurism, then within a short space of time they had been replaced with a new breed of committee members who had less allegiance to the outmoded concept of amateurism. Because the players were still 'amateur', the RFU still had effective control over the players, but the greater the demands on their time, the less the top amateur players had control of their destiny. There developed a sense of resentment against the RFU whose only perspective seemed to be that amateurism must prevail.



Locke viewed authority as belonging to the people and it is their delegates who have the power and authority but only as long as this is the wish of the people. This depends however, on the power relationships within a society or organisation, that is, it may be more important to have authority over key groups or individuals. For the RFU, influence over the international players and the Senior Clubs was instrumental in their authority over the rest of the organisation. When it became clear that these clubs and players did not really accept the RFU definition of amateurism, theirs became the dominant hegemony of the sport.

The Soldan of Egypt or the Emperor of Rome might drive his harmless subjects like brute beasts against their sentiments and inclination. But he must at least have led his mamelukes or praetorian bands like men, by their opinion.<sup>6</sup>

Were the international players the modern day equivalent of mamelukes? They were the ones with most to gain from professionalisation, yet by rewarding them with tours and privileges, the RFU was able to keep their support for amateurism over a number of years. It was once the game had become more democratised and a wider selection of society started to play the sport, that the available rewards were no longer sufficient. Moreover, overseas travel became more commonplace (and therefore perceived as less of a reward) and as international rugby became more exacting each year, the rewards were outstripped by the demands. Later developments within the sport show that it was, in fact, the players who were the true source of power. During this period and up to 1987, because the elite players were not attached, registered or contracted to any club or organisation, they in fact provided a power source to the RFU. The amateur nature of the sport and the absence of dominant clubs, meant players tended to play wherever their careers took them. The clubs themselves did not have any means to reward players either in terms of success or prestige. It was only by playing international rugby that players could gain wider recognition, play in front

of large crowds and undertake tours to other countries. Because it was the Unions who were responsible for selection and the manner in which international matches should be played, they were the ones who in fact had control of these elite players and therefore moulded their approach to the sport. It is an oft-repeated truism that international rugby is the shop-window to the sport and the international players are the ones that set the standards of performance to which other rugby players aspire. It could be argued that prior to the 1960s, the players had little power. As soon as international rugby became more serious and a commercial enterprise, they grew in power. The absence of a realistic alternative to the RFU prevented them from exercising that power to its full potential.

The RFU is based on the traditional model of power and there is a notion of gerontocracy, the rule of the aged. It has become a feature of modern society however, that there is less respect for older generations than there used to be. When Will Carling referred to the RFU Committee as Old Farts, he was reflecting the views of the rest of the team and indicated that, for the international players, there was little respect for the authority of the RFU. Brian Moore recalled how this lack of deference was conveyed:

At that time [1987] the committee felt quite free to come into the dressing room when we were trying to prepare, to give us advice, to tell us how to play...They stopped around 1990, when we started being downright rude to them. "What's that wanker doing down here?" we used to ask in stage whispers. "We don't want that lot here, why don't they go back to their gin and tonics."<sup>7</sup>

There were a number of challenges from the players in late the 1980s and 1990s who were tired of the control the RFU was exerting over their lives, with relatively little reward. The RFU effectively owned the players and were able to control them by diverting discussions and refusing to put professionalism on the agenda. The RFU were the players' only real source of remuneration for playing rugby outside of a



move to rugby league and as long as they insisted on amateurism, there was little the players could do. Will Carling was a highly successful captain of England, he led the players on the pitch and represented their views off it. There is little doubt that these views were contrary to those held by many within the RFU:

They [the RFU officials] were dismissive of the players as a body, scared witless of player power. They thought that we had no idea of what was good for the game, that we were inherently selfish when we had put years and years into rugby for no financial reward whatsoever. I was told on two or three occasions that I took winning too seriously. "We are England," they said. "It's about playing the game."<sup>8</sup>

It is clear that the elite players had little reason to trust the RFU, or to feel a sense of loyalty. When the RFU appeared reluctant to offer professional contracts to the players, they were left with no choice but to accept those offers made by the clubs. In the amateur era the RFU controlled the players, it is because the clubs now control the players that they are the more powerful force in English rugby.

The events of the period after 1995 should not be viewed in isolation. They are the end product of a professionalisation process that has been taking place since 1895. For much of this time, the process has been so slow that it is only possible to recognise it with hindsight. Since 1960, the process of professionalisation has been accelerating and particularly since 1987, the development of professional rugby has been far clearer. That rugby has changed since 1895 is beyond question and the events since 1995 have simply emphasised these changes. Aside from the rather obvious fact that players can now legally be paid for playing, the manner in which rugby is played has also changed. There are some aspects of rugby which are richer for the professional process, particularly levels of skill and athleticism. But there are other changes that traditional rugby supporters may argue have made the sport poorer. These changes include the nature of the rugby club, the players and the game itself.

### **The Clubs**

Club rugby was developed to serve a community whether that community be of the same nationality, boys from the same school, people with similar careers or locality. In this respect, rugby provided an invaluable social service in that it helped people retain their roots. One of the aspects of professionalism from the 1960s was the democratisation of rugby. This was largely of benefit to the game, as it tended to break down the class barriers and so rugby was able to act as a socialising agent. In many clubs, there could be a wide mix of people from all walks of life, mixing through rugby in a way that may not have otherwise been possible. Initially, rugby may have been all they had in common, but through the shared experience of the sport, new bonds were developed. The progression to league rugby from 1987, tended to remove this aspect from some of the clubs. Loyalty between club and player declined, and the drive for league points and promotion (or at least survival in the same division), led clubs to divert recruitment to the rather more instrumental attributes of skill, size and strength. As the importance of rugby increased, certain clubs began to gain reputations as being more serious than others and so started to attract players of similar aspirations. Later some clubs were able to provide a range of incentives to entice players to join them. Since 1995, this drift has intensified as players have moved to clubs on short-term contracts, junior clubs have become professional and the pressure for success has taken clubs away from their local roots. Two clubs from the Midlands, Birmingham Solihull and Worcester have risen from junior club status in the early nineties, to National Division One at the beginning of the 2000/2001 season. On paper, these are great success stories, but the achievement has meant that these clubs offer less of a service to their local community. Both clubs were part of the social fabric of the community. Players would join straight from school and rise up through the teams and later sink



down through the same teams and support the club either from the touchline or on the committees. Today players are recruited from further afield (including overseas) and when their contracts expire, usually leave the club completely. Only the most talented of local players find any sort of welcome. Unfortunately, it would appear that the local players discarded by such clubs are not moving to other clubs, but perhaps disenchanted by the changes to the sport, are leaving rugby altogether. Woodrush, another Midlands club that is less than ten miles from Birmingham & Solihull, has had to withdraw from the league, as they are unable to regularly produce a team of sufficient strength. Further figures from the RFU confirm that over 200 clubs have gone out of existence since 1995.

At the lower levels the game has become too structured in some ways. Leagues have destroyed traditional local derbies replacing them with too many unnecessary long journeys and then there is the problem of registration. Thousands of players have become hooked on the game after having been dragged out of the pub on a Saturday lunchtime when the 'A' team captain discovers he is short of players but that is not allowed anymore. More and more leagues have meant more regulations – if you are not registered you cannot play. At local level that is a real problem and has changed the whole ambience of recreational rugby.<sup>9</sup>

Ironically, after the clubs' drive to achieve elite status since the inception of the leagues (including a merger with Birmingham), Solihull re-formed as an amateur club in 2000 in order to provide rugby for the local community. The club is now playing in a league far lower than its original position. This is a pattern that has been repeated by other clubs, notably Richmond and Gosforth.

### Players

At 1<sup>st</sup> XV levels today, there is little room for the joviality of previous eras. Seriousness and commitment is expected of the players and it has become more difficult for players to play simply for fun.

I think winning has become more important rather than playing some decent rugby to be honest. There seems to be an emphasis on winning, particularly for the leagues, and it doesn't matter how you do it which must stifle some of the flair. The most enjoyable rugby was when we ran it from all over the place. We used to be one of the most entertaining sides in the North Midlands and somehow I think the leagues have detracted from that side of junior club rugby.

*John Leyshon*

Players in the professional era have to be more focused on the job to be done and the 'fun' is limited. Characters that would have been seen as important members of the squad in the past, would not be tolerated today unless their behaviour was in line with the demands of the job.<sup>10</sup> Rugby was a game where the rituals of male bonding were developed to their full. This included drinking heavily after matches, usually in the company of the opposition, thus proving that although you may have caused physical injury to each other during the game, it was only a bit of fun and nothing personal was intended. There were drinking games, songs and activities away from the bar that were described as 'high jinx' by those involved in them, but which may have been viewed as hooliganism if carried out by lower class footballers or their supporters:

Everyone stayed afterwards to have a drink with the opposition. It was very friendly after the game, lots of singing it was a man's world after the game, so no women were around, it just wasn't done. There was a great team spirit, particularly as we were all at school together...On away games we would sometimes stop off at pubs or parties, set off fire extinguishers, steal hotel property, piss in the trifle or the beer, set fire to paper hats. ...When I first went on tour just after the war, the guys who had come back from the war just went mad, drinking, fighting, stupid bar games, even shitting on peoples' heads while they were asleep. It was as if they were so glad they had got back.

*Ken Birrell*

Most of the biographies and autobiographies of players are packed not only with records of their great achievements, but also the social side of rugby. The high level of companionship that was traditional in rugby can only be developed by common experiences. It was the sharing of adversity and success and the mutual respect that



was developed from the struggle with opponents, that created a special bond for many players. These bonds were further cemented by a continuation of their shared experiences away from the playing arena. By recalling these exploits off the field, the players were acknowledging the importance of such activities within the rugby culture. Therefore, the drinking, the tricks and at times the mindless vandalism are recorded alongside the tries, the kicks and the tackles. For example, the 1974 Lions squad had great success in South Africa, being undefeated on the tour, they also famously included a group of players who were known as the 'wreckers' because of their treatment of hotels and bars.<sup>11</sup> To some extent this type of behaviour has become part of the residual hegemony. The professional players have both a greater need to respect their bodies and recognise the need to portray an appropriate public image:

I don't think would happen now, or if it did I think it would probably be covered up. I also think that players are far more aware of the wider issue now and whereas before the sort of people that drink bottles of after shave were very much part of the culture of rugby. I think its moved on enormously now and is very professional. I think that culture in terms of peer pressure has changed. Previously if you weren't seen to be having a drink and you weren't seen to be part of the crowd then you were seen very much as an outsider. I think there's been a fundamental shift in terms of amateur and professional. Being able to say "no I don't really want to get involved in this, I don't really want to have a beer" is fundamental change of mindset amongst the players. There are still occasions when players have a few beers but it's usually in a more confined area and you do it amongst your own rather than going out into town.

*Damian Hopley*

An integral part of the sport was the cavalier teams that were put together from a multitude of other clubs, with the express intention of playing with a little extra flair. Often those lucky enough to be selected could get to know a wider circle of players and play in a manner that entertained both participant and spectator. Teams such as the Guanos, Penguins, Major Stanleys XV and most famously the Barbarians, played strictly for fun. Unfortunately, in the modern era, even these teams were under pressure to perform, although there were always those players who retained the philosophy of fun:

The Barbarian ethos is that you don't train – you just play and I organised a training session as the captain of the Barbarians and the three Frenchmen in the side refused to train and we started the Auckland grid. They started to head the ball, kick the ball, overhead kicks and said that – to paraphrase – we don't train, we are Barbarians, we do what's in the song. So we went out and had a game of football... I played 1990 to 1992 and the threat was that the Barbarians could go under and could cease to be. I remember being told as Skipper, when we went out to play against Cardiff at the Arms Park, that it didn't matter how we played, we just needed to win.

Ruari Maclean

Increased club commitments and later, contractual obligations made it difficult to select the best players and reduced the significance of these teams. Other symbolic features of rugby union such as the Easter tour and end of season Sevens, also either disappeared due to fixture pressures or became another serious and intensive event.

### The Game

In the late 19th Century the controversy over hacking had continued, but in keeping with the desire within society for more civilised behaviour, it gradually died out. There remained those die-hards for whom a game of rugby was not complete without a real opportunity to show their bravery by giving and receiving pain without complaint. It was what being a real man was all about and if those watching from the side gasped in horror, incredulity or admiration, then this only increased the worthiness of a game only a few were tough enough to play. This machismo aspect of the sport continued until recent times, with players glorying in their ability to give and take punishment. As long as rugby remained immune to commercial demands, it could maintain its position as a sport where men could demonstrate their masculine traits. Some players became infamous as 'hard men' and revelled in their reputations. After being punched early in his career Mike Burton developed a philosophy of his own. The words "never stay down" meant never stand back from confrontation, never let the opposition tower over you psychologically, never leave undone something in a game which would have benefited your team no matter how distasteful or dangerous.



Burton developed a reputation for being a tough player and was sent off four times in his career.<sup>12</sup> The assertive nature of rugby provides a thin dividing line between acceptable and unacceptable acts of aggression. One of the concerns of those individuals who were against the professionalisation of rugby was that the incentive of points and win bonuses would encourage players to adopt heightened levels of violence and cheating. As the sport became more serious, there were those who were prepared to go to great lengths to ensure victory. Wales have never beaten the All Blacks, but in 1978 Wales were leading 12-10 with a few minutes to go when they had a lineout deep in their own half. Andy Haden, the All Black, devised a plan that had the tacit blessing of his captain. "I remember walking over to Mourie (the captain)...and murmuring 'I'm going to dive –shall I?'"<sup>13</sup> The penalty he was awarded won the match. There have also been those who have linked the payment for playing with an undesirable increase in the 'win at all costs' attitude. Willie John McBride has argued that money and greed are the worst evils and that rugby has been ruined.

Everything now is geared to winning. You didn't see the professional fouls in the past that you do now.<sup>14</sup>

It may be that he is looking back through rose tinted spectacles. This was the man who was so determined to win as the amateur captain of the 1974 British Lions, that he devised the 99 call (To stop intimidation, at the call 99 all the Lions' players would fight with the nearest member of the opposition) which enabled his side to get their retaliation in first. It is another example, however, of how observers had associated money with professionalism, when in fact the game had already lost many of its amateur ideals. In fact, an unintended (and unforeseen) consequence of full professionalism has been that there is less violence in the sport today than at any other

time. The reason for this is that the policing of rugby has also become more professional.

As the game went professional so did everything else around it...With the advent of talking flags, video cameras it is very difficult to get away these days with things you could get away with in the past, when the referee was the guy in sole charge. Touch judges were people who pitched up with your team. They weren't independent and would turn a blind eye to what was taking place on the field, unless the opposition were doing it.

*Brian Ashton*

As a professional sport dependent on producing an attractive spectacle, there was clearly an incentive for the RFU and IRB to clean up the sport. The violence of the previous era, including the toe-to-toe fighting sometimes seen in key matches, has largely been eradicated from the sport. The range of punishments available to both individuals and teams has led to a high degree of restraint from the participants. Players are sent to the sinbin more often for the "professional foul" than for violent play and this offence is more about spoiling the game as a spectacle than anything else. It would certainly appear that sport at the top level is more concerned with the end result, than the means by which it is achieved, a fact that is regretted by those who have witnessed the change. Bunny Austen (Davis Cup Winner 1933-1936) shortly before his death in 2000 said:

The emphasis on winning today is dead wrong. It's a great pity. The object of sport and sportsmanship is to enjoy yourself. Win or lose, it takes the same spirit.<sup>15</sup>

Rugby as it is played today is far removed from that of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Today's players are infinitely faster, fitter and stronger but they also have a far greater repertoire of skills than in previous eras. Because rugby players at the top level have to entertain they must possess the necessary skills to provide the means to enthrall. Essentially these are the ability to run, pass, catch and tackle in a high speed contact sport. In this respect rugby union has moved closer towards rugby league and while in



previous eras players in different positions had specific roles, today they are expected to fulfil those roles and also play 'total rugby'. Many people prefer the modern version, recognising that a major benefit of professional players is the amount of time they can spend on their physical conditioning and honing their skills. However there are others who preferred the amateur version:

I think it is a very entertaining game. I think it is very exciting. Fast and skilful.  
*Bill Beaumont*

First of all it is significantly faster. I think that the skill level is immeasurably greater today and I think potentially that because of the relatively low error rate in the showpiece games and in top class rugby, it can be a very attractive spectacle.  
*John White*

It frightens me. I don't know whether it's the same sort of game that I played. It seems faster, it seems harder, it seems more intense.  
*Steve Holdstock*

I don't enjoy it to be honest. If I didn't see another International it wouldn't particularly bother me, as a spectacle, I get bored with it. One side's got the ball, one side keeps it, more or less till it makes a mistake.  
*John Leyshon*

Well, I have to say that I have lost interest in it really. The demands are greater but I don't find it that interesting and I think the fact that it's become so competitive and winning is so crucial to every encounter now, I think the players have lost a lot.  
*Bernard White*

There is, however, a danger that because the laws are being developed to enable highly skilled, fit athletes to entertain the crowds, the sport may lose its significance for the average individual. One of the fears of the RFU at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century was that the amateur could not compete equally with the professional. There is no doubt that this fear has been confirmed in modern rugby, but also there is perhaps the greater danger that the amateur will not even want to try. The professional gladiators of Ancient Rome may have provided a great spectacle for the masses, but they did not inspire others to try the same activities for fun.

**What if?**

In 1895, the RFU stood firm against the threat of a breakaway by those clubs who wanted to take rugby in a new direction. The immediate result was the loss of a number of clubs and a reduction of England's playing strength over the next two decades. However, the RFU retained authority and eventually England became the dominant power in Europe once again. By comparison, in 1995 the RFU did not stand firm and gradually sacrificed its authority but retained the clubs and players. It is not possible to determine which of these responses to professionalisation was the 'correct' one, nevertheless it is interesting to consider what might have happened if the RFU had contrived a different outcome. From the 1895 scenario, there already exists a pattern on which to base "what if"? Rugby had followed the development of soccer, even to the extent that the sport had polarised into a northern professional versus southern amateur debate. It is reasonable to presume, therefore, that had the RFU managed the drift towards professionalism in the same way as the FA, then professional rugby would have evolved in much the same manner as professional soccer. Over a period of decades, clubs would have found their level within a pyramid structure and established an appropriate level of professionalism according to their resources. Thus, there would be some clubs with entirely full-time professional playing staff; some clubs with predominantly part-time players and others who would be considered amateur. The scenario, as presented in 1995, forced clubs to become professional overnight and almost inevitably, some failed drastically. A more phased evolution would have enabled clubs to reach their own level in stages as in soccer (for example Wimbledon FC). The opportunities that full-time professionalism affords players in the development of skills and fitness, has been clear since 1995 and a century of professional rugby would have led to higher performance levels by the top



players. Together with a gradual development of the laws to suit both players and spectators, there is no reason why the popularity of rugby could not be far greater. The earlier development of a World Cup (soccer beat rugby to this event by fifty-seven years) could have made rugby more of a worldwide phenomenon. The 1895 schism cost England their lead in the sport as a playing nation and they never regained this position. The availability during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century of those who chose to play rugby league rather than rugby union, may have severely altered England's status. Although it was often Wales that complained they were losing the cream of their players to rugby league, at least they had some years of their service before they 'went north'. England never had the benefit of players such as Wagstaff, Gregory, Lydon, Murphy, Edwards and Hanley. If players such as these and other 'greats' from rugby league had been playing the same code, not only would British teams have been enhanced but also the potential success that may have been achieved could have vastly improved both the player and spectator base for rugby. It should be noted, however, that one rugby code would have also benefited other countries, notably New Zealand and Australia. Nevertheless, raising the standards of performance could only benefit the sport as a whole. To complete this potential scenario, by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century rugby could have developed into a structure similar to soccer with thriving professional domestic and European club competitions; a truly competitive international format and the potential to rival soccer as the number one sport in the world.

Although in 1895, the split significantly weakened the RFU and the loss of many of the leading players affected the strength of the England team, it was probably considered a price worth paying. Amateurism was the norm and so there was still a significant role for the RFU to play. Because they did not need money to survive, the loss of the gate taking clubs and the leading players was survivable. In the immediate

era post 1995, the RFU could not afford to lose these players and so to a large extent, they were forced to concede authority. The situation could have been avoided if the RFU had recognised far earlier that the development of professional rugby at an elite level was inevitable from the late 1980s. The evolution of the leagues and the World Cup and the subsequent demands on the players, made payment for playing inescapable. At this stage, the RFU could have instituted a contract system for the leading players whereby they were paid by the RFU who would have first call on their services. The players would have then been able to establish a further contract with any club. The advantage of the RFU having primacy over the leading players is that they could then develop whatever system they desired, that would provide a relatively small number of highly competitive matches to develop these players. Therefore, the RFU could and should have preserved the amateur game by establishing a professional elite of super-clubs. The RFU could have developed a monopoly for clubs whereby they had to declare themselves professional and satisfy certain criteria such as stadium, finances and spectator base, before they were allowed to become a professional club. This elite would have had a share of the funds and the amateur clubs would also have had their share. A carefully structured season could have been designed to allow for international matches, professional club leagues and amateur competition. Those clubs outside of this elite would continue to play their normal fixtures, knowing that a short term foray into professionalism would not be sufficient for entry to the higher levels, thus leading to a more circumspect approach to club development.

### **The end of amateur rugby?**

The RFU was so distracted by their desire to retain non-payment for playing at the elite level, that they lost sight of the concept of amateurism at the grass roots level



of rugby by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The emphasis on playing for fun, of camaraderie and a desire to play attractive rugby for the sake of the players, was still prevalent. The provision of a focal point for the local population and the social side of rugby was its real strength and much of this has been under threat since 1995. The RFU has further been guilty of largely ignoring the lower levels of the sport by devoting so much time, attention and financial support to the elite. Figures from the RFU have shown that club rugby is suffering greatly and in addition to developing rugby at international level, the RFU also needs to provide resources to maintain the amateur side of the sport. Those who played during the amateur era have different views as to its merits, but share the belief that they were better for their experiences:

We absolutely just played for fun. Everyone was a gentleman when I played, much more so than now. A certain class, officer, gentleman.

*Tommy Wallis*

There was camaraderie, certainly there were friendships to be made. I still see people I played with 20 years ago, go on holiday with them, and drink with them, fish with them. Socially, it was a far bigger part of my life than anything else, my wife became part of it, my children became part of it and I made some of the best friends I shall ever have playing rugby and if nothing else I suppose you grow up with it.

*Steve Holdstock*

Enjoyment really. Enjoyment, friendship, bloody good time really without too much effort. Got you out of the house, got you away from work. It was a pastime in effect and I wouldn't have wanted it to be any more than that.

*John Leyshon*

I think as amateurs we did have more fun, drinks after the match (and before in some cases) and there was a lot of camaraderie. I have no regrets. I don't envy them, it's just a different era. I used to like playing rugby and then going to work afterwards.

*Barry Corless*

I have been very lucky to have seen rugby from a number of different sides. I have been involved in Club, County, England Trials, England, British Lions, then more recently on the International Board and the RFU Management. When you stop playing it is really over. As a player having a few beers after the match is great but as soon as you are not a player, you are not involved, no matter what - it is not the same.

*Bill Beaumont*

It may be that the preservation of all that was good in the amateur ethos, lies in the hands of one of the nations that was at the forefront of the dismantling of those aspects of amateurism that had proved to be an anachronism. Australia has developed a professional ethos that is as much about excellence as it is about financial remuneration. The national team is required to emphasise success with pride but also humility. The coach of the 1999 World Champions gives great significance to the need to preserve the heritage of rugby union:

Money is a consequence of playing, not a motivation...We have to use this as a platform to get things right at all levels in the professional arena. There is still some distance to go but along the way we must not lose the traditional values and ethos that make rugby union so special.<sup>16</sup>

There was much to admire in the amateur ethos and there is much to admire in a professional approach to playing sport. The years of denigrating professionalism whilst espousing a form of amateurism that had long ceased to exist, undoubtedly held back the development of rugby. Rugby union must be able to provide for the full range of commitment, from the recreationally motivated amateur, to the serious part-time professional and through to the elite sportsman. If this is to be accomplished, then it will require the RFU to remain as the governing body of the sport in order that the game may retain its appeal to all levels of performer. The RFU must approach the era of open rugby with the intention of developing the sport for the future, yet retaining the positive aspects of its amateur past.

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<sup>3</sup> Yorkshire Owl, 4/10/1893 cited in *ibid* p142

<sup>4</sup> J. Probyn & B. Newcombe, (1993), Upfront: The Jeff Probyn Story, Mainstream Publishing, Edinburgh p151



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# **APPENDICES**

# APPENDIX 1

## RFU PRESIDENTS 1913-1949

<u>NAME</u>	<u>YEARS</u>	<u>EDUCATED</u>	<u>OCCUPATION</u>	<u>CONSTITUENT BODY</u>
A. Hartley	1913- 1920	Castleford	Architect Alderman	Yorkshire
E. Prescott	1920- 1922	Merchant Taylors; Cambridge	Solicitor Master of the Merchant Taylors Company	Middlesex
R.Henzell	1922- 1923		Director Henzell Oil Co. President Northumberland LTA	Northumberland
M.F. Walters	1923- 1924	Merchant Taylors	Solicitor	Surrey
W.S.Donne	1924- 1925	Kings School, Bruton	Twine rope manufacturer, Alderman	Somerset
H.E.Ferens	1925- 1926	Richmond, Yorks; Durham University	Solicitor Senior Alderman	Durham
J.Baxter	1926- 1927	Liverpool Institute	Insurance company Manager	Cheshire
Sir Percy M.R.Royds	1927- 1928	Eastmans, Southsea; Royal Naval College	Royal Navy Admiral MP	Royal Navy
V.H. Cartwright	1928- 1929	Rugby School; Oxford	Solicitor	South Africa
W.T.Pearce	1929- 1932	Horsfield School, Bristol	Advertising Agent	Gloucester
A.D.Stoop	1932- 1933	Rugby School: Oxford	Barrister	Central District
R.F.Oakes	1933- 1934	Hartlepool	Timber Merchant	Yorkshire
J.Milnes	1934- 1935	Marlborough College	Textile trade	Lancashire
J.E.Greenwood	1935- 1937	Dulwich College; Cambridge	Chartered Accountant JP	Cambridge University
Major-General Sir Basil A. Hill	1937- 1939	Neuenheim College, Heidelberg; Royal Naval College	Army	The Army
G.C.Robinson	1939- 1940	Dame Allan's School, Newcastle	Coal Exporter JP	Northumberland
J.Daniell	1945- 1947	Clifton College; Cambridge	Tea Planter	Central District
B.C. Hartley	1947- 1948	Dulwich College; Cambridge	Colonel, Army	Cambridge University; The Army
Dr L.G. Brown	1948- 1949	Brisbane Grammar School, Brisbane	Surgeon	New South Wales



## APPENDIX 2

### **Extract from the Rugby Football Union's Rules as to Professionalism**

1. Professionalism is illegal.

2. Acts of professionalism are:

By an individual:

(a) Asking, receiving, or relying on a promise, direct or implied, to receive any money consideration whatever, actual or prospective, any employment or advancement, any establishment in business, or any compensation whatever for playing football or rendering any service to a football organisation; training or loss of time connected therewith; time lost in playing football, or in traveling in connection with football, expenses in excess on the amount actually disbursed on account of reasonable hotel or traveling expenses

(b) Transferring his services from one club to another in opposition to rule 6.

(c) Playing for a club while receiving, or after having received, from such club any consideration whatever for acting as secretary, treasurer, or in any other office, or for doing, or for having done any work or labour about the club's ground or in connection with the club's affairs.

(d) Remaining on tour at his club's expense longer than is reasonable.

(e) Giving or receiving any money testimonial, or giving or receiving any other testimonial, except under the authority of this union.

(f) Receiving any medal or other prize for any competition, except under the authority of this union.

(g) Playing on any ground where gate money is taken during the close season: in any match or contest where it is previously agreed that less than fifteen players on each side shall take part.

(h) Knowingly playing with or against any expelled or suspended player or club

(i) Refusing to give evidence or otherwise assist in carrying out these rules when requested by this union to do so.

(j) Being registered as or declared a professional, or suspended by any national union, or by the Football Association.

(k) Playing within eight days of any accident for which he has claimed or received insurance compensation, if insured under these rules.

(l) Playing in any benefit match connected directly or indirectly with football.

## APPENDIX 2

(m) Knowingly playing or acting as referee or touch-judge on the ground of an expelled or suspended club.

By a club or other organisation:

(a) Playing or promising payment, or giving, offering, or promising any inducement as to employment, advancement, or establishment in business, or any compensation whatever, to any player for playing for that club, training, or for traveling expenses to or from any training resort, or for loss of time in connection with training, loss of time while playing or traveling in connection with football, hotel or traveling expenses in excess of the sum actually and reasonably disbursed.

(b) Receiving as a member a member of another club in opposition to rule 6.

(c) Receiving or continuing as a member anyone it may pay or have paid for either regular or occasional services.

(d) Paying for any of its teams, players, officials, or members, on tour longer than a reasonable time, or paying for more than a reasonable number.

(e) Giving from its funds, subscribing, or playing a match for any testimonial.

(f) Giving any medal or other prize for any competition except under the authority of this union.

(g) Taking gate money at any ground during the close season, at any match or contest where it is previously agreed that less than fifteen players on each side shall take part.

(h) Knowingly playing or allowing its members to play with or against any expelled or suspended player or club.

(i) Refusing to produce its books or documents, or to allow its officials or members to give evidence, or to assist in carrying out these rules when requested by the union to do so.

(j) Knowingly playing or admitting as a member without the consent of the union any member of an expelled or suspended club, or any expelled or suspended player, or any person registered as a declared professional, or suspended by any National Rugby Union, or by the Football Association.

(k) Knowingly allowing a players to play in its matches within eight days of any accident for which he has received or claimed insurance compensation if insured under these rules.

(l) Playing or allowing its ground to be used for any benefit match connected directly or indirectly with football.

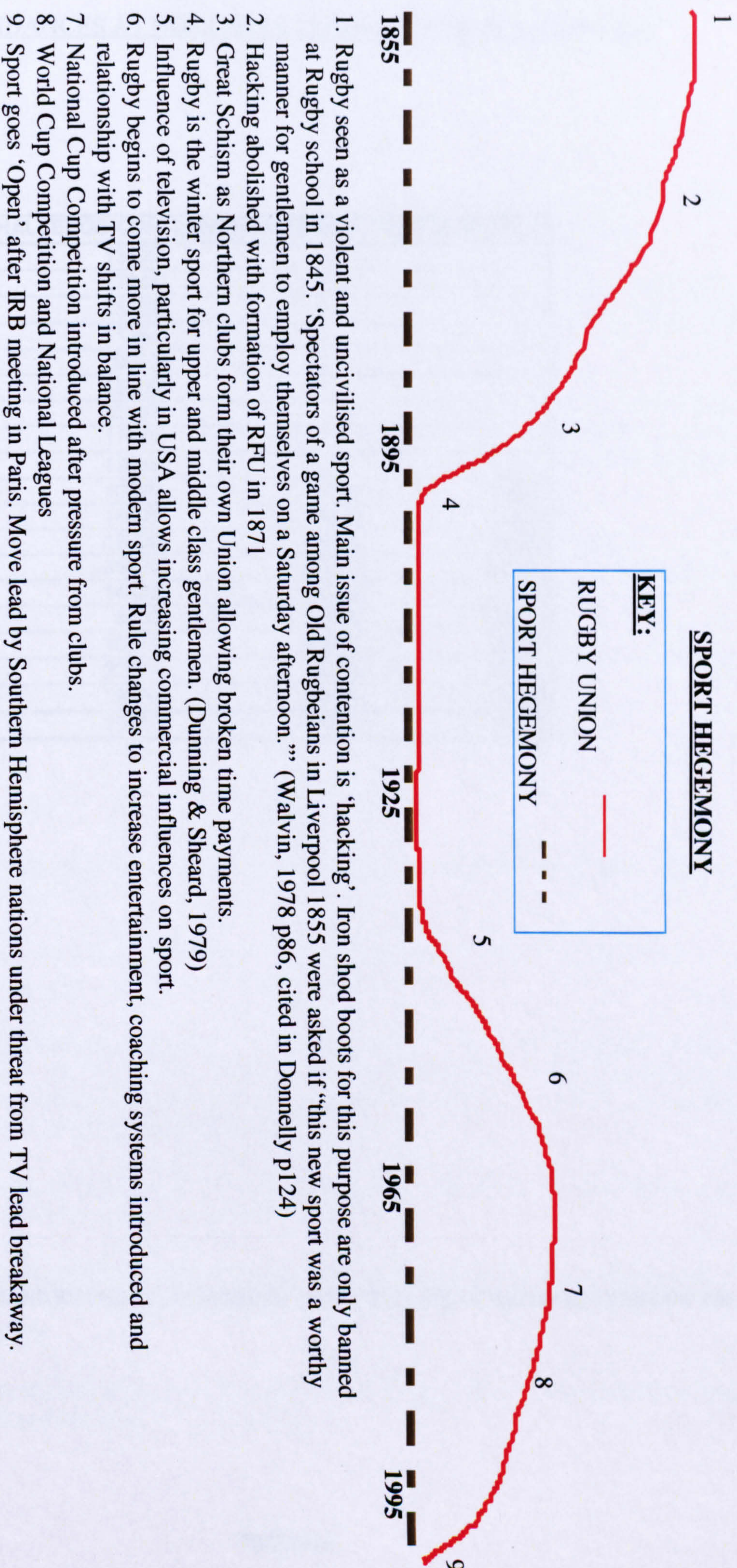


## APPENDIX 2

- (m) Knowingly allowing its members or teams to play on the ground of any expelled or suspended club.
- (n) Refusing to pay within one month any costs or expenses ordered by this union for inquiries held under these rules.

From Budd, A *et al* (1900) Football, London. cited in Vamplew, W , (1988), Pay Up & Play The Game, pp306-7 Cambridge University Press, Cambridge







ATTENDANCES AT NORTHERN UNION CUP FINALS: 1897-1914

YEAR	CHALLENGE CUP	LANCASHIRE CUP	YORKSHIRE CUP
1897	13492		
1898	27941		
1899	15763		
1900	17864		
1901	29563		
1902	15006		
1903	32507		
1904	17041		
1905	19638		
1906	16000	13000	14500
1907	18500	14048	10500
1908	18000	14000	15000
1909	30000	20000	13000
1910	14600	14000	22000
1911	8000	14000	19000
1912	15271	20000	20000
1913	22574	6000	16000
1914	19000	18000	12000
MEAN	19487	14783	15778

SOURCE; ROTHMANS RL 1982-83, AYLESBURY (1982) PP127,150,157 CITED IN VAMPLEW P66

High Time We Started to Win

By THE SPORTS EDITOR

DAILY MAIL 4<sup>TH</sup> JULY 1950

A BRITAIN tired of defeat out-of-doors looks this week to Troon and to Henley for news that will help to wipe the grin off the face of the sporting world.

When a riverside expert declares that Britain may win the Diamond Sculls for the first time since 1933, I wince and think of Rio de Janeiro. Why the "may" and why "since 1933"?

Just why did England fail to win a place in the final series of the World Soccer Cup? Why were the West Indies able to beat us at Lord's? And why so early in the Wimbledon tournament as last Thursday did we learn that Britain had departed from the stage of the men's singles?

The secret of all this failure may be that we must shed complacency in our approach to our games - and go after these other fellows whose most coveted prize is just to beat us ... the old Kings of the Green.

Is there a way in which we can start winning again? I asked three "Daily Mail" sports writers for their views in their respective fields. Here they are:

SOCCER

By Roy Peskett

One reason for our Soccer eclipse in the World Cup stands out clearly - our men are too gentlemanly.

It's all very well being ambassadors and pukka sahibs, but in a street fight you don't play a violin - you use it as a club.

I am not advocating rough play, but our opponents in international games seem to be playing to "no foul" rules - and so do some of the referees - and "drawing-room instructions" before the game merely take the venom out of our lads before they start, robbing them of that vital will to win.

If we are to enter again for the World Cup, in four years' time, we must replan a lot of things about the game we taught the world.

Of primary importance is that the team manager must be given supreme control.

One man's job

We must scrap selectors and stand or fall by one man whose job would be to instil more devil and less science into the team.



Clubs must take a less close-fisted attitude, and be prepared to release their players for intensive international training throughout the season.

Our men are still, however, in demand. They were asked to play Argentina in Buenos Aires tomorrow and an exhibition match against Italy in Rio.

Both requests were turned down. Quite right, too. Let's get the team back to England as quickly as possible - and get out the lesson-books.

### CRICKET

By Alex Bannister

I believe our county system is out of date and there is too much cricket of a competitive nature for the tip-top players. Few people, outside the game, realise the tremendous concentration needed for a score of any proportion, and this, six days a week, produces jaded and cricket-weary players.

As soon as one game is finished they have to rush off to another part of the country, and as often as not a team arrives in the small hours of the morning. They snatch a few hours' sleep and off they are again. It's a killing pace.

#### Still a game

Overseas players of the standing of Australia and the West Indies have a fresher approach to the game than ours. Cricket remains to them a game. They play less big cricket, and, as a result, have a better chance of pulling something extra out for a Test.

Consider the case of Alec Bedser, the Surrey and England bowler. So far he has sent down 609 overs this season, compared with 381 delivered by the three West Indies pace men, Hines Johnson, Prior Jones and Lance Pierre.

In the past in more than one county side the professional had to make way for the amateur as soon as he was available, irrespective of the needs of the side. They are paying for this folly now.

Recruitment of staff was, and perhaps still is, haphazard. The youngster asked for a trial. He was not approached. There are many old professionals who could be recruited to go round the little clubs and scout for talent - and I'd guarantee they would find some.

In international cricket since the war England have often shown a lack of fighting spirit, often due to uninspiring captaincy. We must have the best man for the job whether he is amateur or professional.

There is a growing body of opinion in favour of county cricket on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday played by players (not by amateurs and professionals), and the rest of the week devoted to business.

That, broadly speaking, is how they do it in Australia.

## TENNIS

By Stanley Doust

The Lawn Tennis Association have evolved coaching systems that, on paper, seem a progressive step, but, up to the present, have not produced good results.

By all means teach youngsters the basic principles. But don't let us make the mistake of trying to teach them beyond that stage. This makes them too dependent on what they are told and does not encourage them to think for themselves.

There is an inclination, also, to make our young players change their natural style instead of developing their shots. In other words we try to make too many players play in the same way.

### Robot menace

Lawn tennis is a game that expresses the character of the player as much as any other sport, and if youngsters are made to become robots, then their natural ability vanishes.

I would stop any coach from altering style or grips of players who have reached 18.

I would also make these young players learn by the hard school of match - or tournament - play. Make them enter in tournaments where they are certain to be beaten, and if they have sufficient keenness they will analyse for themselves why they were beaten and go and practise those weaknesses which caused them to lose.

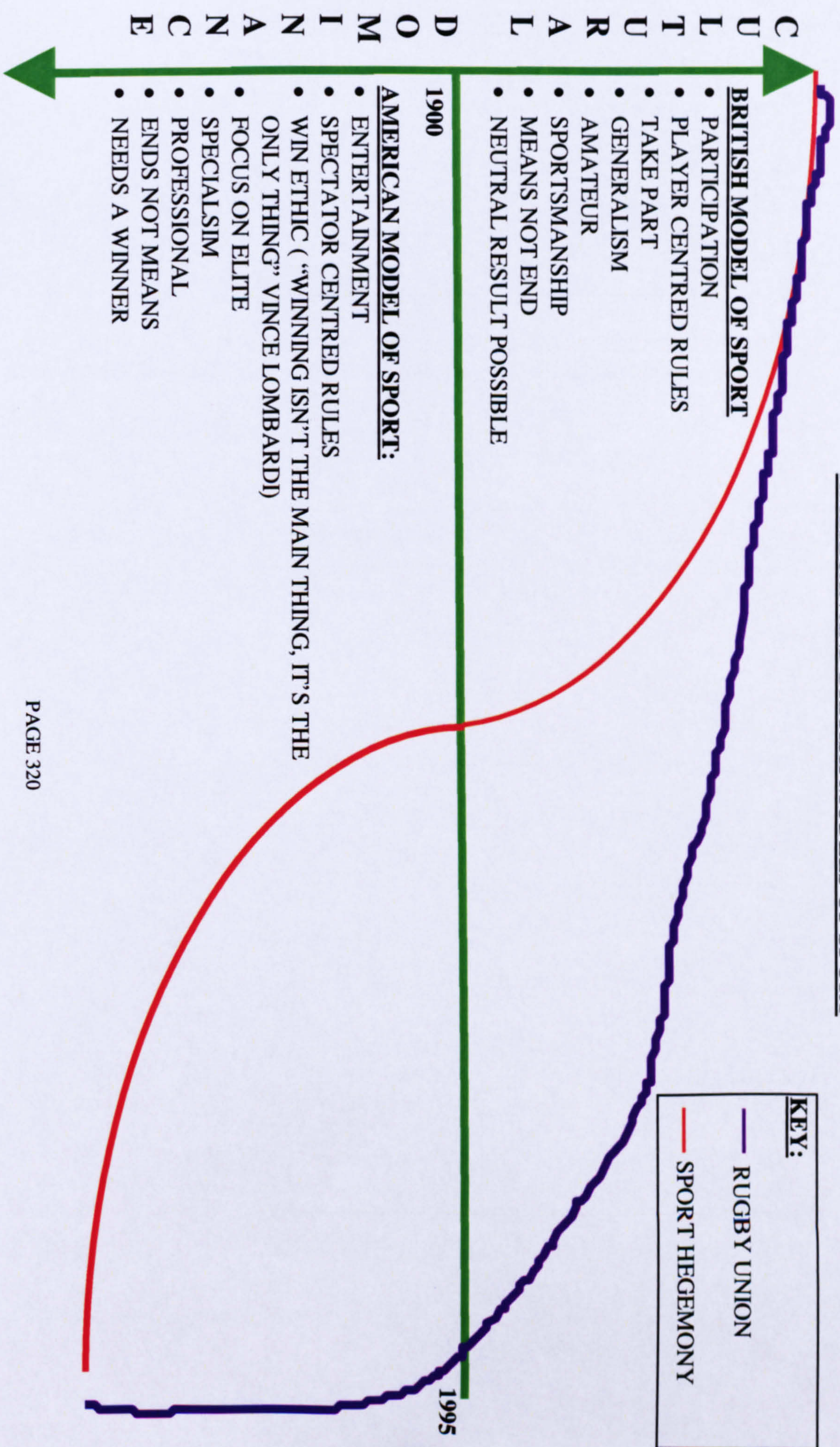
Our young players must work harder, they must be prepared to be in constant training, even if it means giving up dances and other enjoyments.

Pauline Betz, the U.S. player who won the Wimbledon championship in 1946, told me that when she was a budding junior player in California she got up at 6 a.m. and with her brother played on a public park court till breakfast time.

She went to work till 4 in the afternoon and was again on the court at 5. She did this for several years. Are our juniors willing to work as hard as this? It is the only way to success.



AMERICAN AND BRITISH MODELS OF SPORT





**Pure, bloody mayhem paraded as sport****SPORTSMAIL COMMENT****DAILY MAIL 9<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 1970**

MILLIONS who watched BBC television on Saturday had their afternoon's sport sullied by the disgraceful conduct in the Rugby League World Cup Final. Had it taken place in the streets the parties would have been jailed.

There were cruel assaults by Australian and British thugs dressed as Rugby players, buttings, kickings, punchings, stampings. The 'importance' of the occasion became an excuse for them to kick lumps out of each other, to commit every type of foul. Viewers must have wondered if the

players knew the rules, indeed whether there are any rules. This was pure, bloody mayhem paraded as sport. And it happens most weeks.

Maybe this was a little worse than most professional Rugby on TV but we are subjected to so much of it that this last dose was just too much to take. Rugby League was conceived in good faith last century by some who broke away from the amateur game because they felt players should not lose money to enjoy their sport. If spectators were willing to watch then why should the players not share the benefit? Now it is an anachronism, an excuse for viciousness and violence that debases the people who promote and organise it as much as the people who 'play' it.

**Reluctant**

A few years ago it was ready to die a natural death. It had always been limited, in Britain, to the North and even in the strongholds of Yorkshire and Lancashire gates were declining at an alarming rate. It saved itself by selling out to television. The BBC were willing to pay handsomely and though the attendances continued to go down the cash kept the clubs alive.

Eddie Waring, a considerable commentator, has often made light of violent incidents with amusing comments. But they have become less than amusing when they have had to be applied to a game that has become so ugly. Over the years there had been an ever-increasing permissiveness until the hooligans of a decade ago are the heroes of today. Even the true lovers of the finer aspects of the game were reluctant to speak up because they realised the alternative was the end of Rugby League as a major sport.

It took another televised match on Saturday to show the extent to which the sport has suffered. The Fijian Rugby Union players took part in a game of fierce physical effort. There were warnings from the referee. Yet this came over as sparkling stuff, super-fast and wonderful sport. The contrast was reflected in the attitude of the spectators. The crowd at the match against the East Midlands side cheered the fine efforts against their own team and laughed with the Fijians because they were so obviously enjoying themselves.



**Snarling**

Compare that with the grim, sour, snarling punch-ups at Headingley and the baying, booing, and hissing from the terraces there. What the televiewers saw was not amusing, not entertaining, not edifying and certainly not sport. It was the sort of thing we are trying to eliminate from our society and it was subsidised by public money. The BBC has a duty this morning to sit down and decide what should replace it on our screens.

**Table to show earnings of team performers 1996**

<u>RANK</u>	<u>NAME</u>	<u>SPORT</u>	<u>EARNINGS</u>	<u>NAME</u>	<u>SPORT</u>	<u>EARNINGS</u>
1	Michael Jordon	Basketball	\$52.6 million	Alan Shearer	Soccer	£2.5 million
2	Shaquille O'Neal	Basketball	\$24.4 million	Paul Gascoigne	Soccer	£2.2 million
3	Emmitt Smith	US Football	\$16.5 million	Paul Ince	Soccer	£2 million
4	Dennis Rodman	Basketball	\$12.9 million	Ryan Giggs	Soccer	£1.7 million
5	Patrick Ewing	Basketball	\$12.4 million	David Platt	Soccer	£1.3 million
6	Carl Ripkin Jr	Baseball	\$12 million	Les Ferdinand	Soccer	£1.2 million
7	Dan Marino	US Football	\$11.7 million	Ian Wright	Soccer	£1.1 million
8	Wayne Gretzky	Ice Hockey	\$11.5 million	Stan Collymore	Soccer	£1 million
9	Grant Hill	Basketball	\$10.8 million	Andy Cole	Soccer	£0.85 million
10	Ken Griffey Jr	Baseball	\$10.8 million	John Barnes	Soccer	£0.8 million

Source: CRSS Sports Resources, (1997), The Commercialisation of Sport, [www.le.ac.uk/crss/info/resource/commerce.html](http://www.le.ac.uk/crss/info/resource/commerce.html)



## APPENDIX 9

### Interview questions

1. Time Professionals: How has the time spent involved in playing rugby changed over your career?
2. Taking the game seriously: Has the seriousness with which players approach the game of rugby changed?
3. Coaching: How has coaching and training changed?
4. Means not end: Has there been a change in the desire to win matches?
5. Gentlemen: Did the notion of gentlemanly behaviour change during your career?
6. Legal & financial: Were there material rewards available to players before 1995?
7. Professional Sport: How was Rugby League regarded in Union circles? What about professionals from other sports?
8. What do you think of rugby as played today?
9. If yours was the only record of changes in the amateur ethos, is there anything else you would like to say?